



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



MONDAY — 11 APR 2022

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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	04/10 April warmup to surge across eastern US
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/04/10/weather-eastern-April-warmup/3791649621680/
GIST	<p>AccuWeather forecasters say that warmer days lie ahead for communities in the eastern half of the nation. As the jet stream transitions northward and pushes into southeastern Canada, mild conditions will surge across the region.</p> <p>Early Sunday morning, unseasonably chilly air held firm across parts of the eastern United States. Residents in the Northeast recorded temperatures ranging in the 30s and 40s. Across the higher elevations of western New York, western Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, even a few snowflakes were reported. Much of the Tennessee Valley and portions of the Carolinas, Alabama and Georgia, were under either freeze warnings or frost advisories due to the low temperatures into early Sunday.</p> <p>While milder conditions already started to be felt on Sunday across portions of the Ohio Valley and the Southeast, forecasters claim that the temperatures won't stop rising there.</p> <p>"After dealing with low temperatures in the mid-30s and patchy frost Sunday night into early Monday morning, cities like Richmond, Va., will have a huge turnaround in temperatures with a high near 75 F Monday afternoon," explained AccuWeather Senior Meteorologist Danny Pydynowski.</p> <p>Compared with where they started in the morning, this would mark a temperature climb of 40 degrees on Monday! While not quite reaching record levels, the warmup will be sustained with highs near 80 Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, pointed out Pydynowski.</p> <p>Some might be eager to get outdoors and participate in popular springtime activities such as walking, hiking, bird-watching, picnicking, or biking. Tuesday will be the prime opportunity to do so for people located along the Southeastern coast and interior Northeast. By Wednesday, outdoor plans may be limited with rain and thunderstorms forecast to develop in the Mississippi Valley, Ohio Valley, and interior Northeast.</p> <p>From Tuesday to Thursday, daytime temperatures from the Tennessee Valley to the Northeast will range between 10-15 degrees above average. Experts say that this spring warmup can help provide nature the boost it needs for flowers and greenery to flourish.</p>

	<p>By Tuesday, widespread 70s will shift as far north as Kentucky, southeastern Pennsylvania, and northern New Jersey. Temperatures in the low 80s will be possible throughout much of the Southeastern states.</p> <p>The Steel City of Pittsburgh is expected to reach a high of 73 F on Wednesday, roughly 11 degrees above normal. By Thursday, places in central New Jersey such as Princeton will have a chance at getting into the low 80s, almost a whopping 20 degrees above average.</p> <p>Locations farther south will not be excluded from the warmup, especially in comparison to temperatures this weekend. Although it will be to a lesser extent, most Southeastern city's daytime highs may range from 4-8 degrees above average from Tuesday to Thursday.</p> <p>Portions of central and South Florida can reach into the lower 90s F from middle to late week. Fort Myers is expected to reach a daytime high of 92 F by midweek.</p> <p>Temperatures this weekend will trend back down to near normal or slightly below normal. Most residents throughout the Northeast will see daytime highs ranging from the 50s to 60s, while Southeastern cities are forecast to be in the 70s and 80s.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/11 Chechen chief: Russia will take Kyiv
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/chechen-chief-kadyrov-says-russian-forces-will-take-kyiv-2022-04-11/
GIST	<p>April 11 (Reuters) - Ramzan Kadyrov, the powerful head of Russia's republic of Chechnya, said early on Monday that there will be an offensive by Russian forces not only on the besieged port of Mariupol, but also on Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities.</p> <p>"There will be an offensive ... not only on Mariupol, but also on other places, cities and villages," Kadyrov said in a video posted on his Telegram channel.</p> <p>"Luhansk and Donetsk - we will fully liberate in the first place ... and then take Kyiv and all other cities."</p> <p>Kadyrov, who has often described himself as Russian President Vladimir Putin's "foot soldier," said there should be no doubt about Kyiv.</p> <p>"I assure you: not one step will be taken back," Kadyrov said.</p> <p>Kadyrov has been repeatedly accused by the United States and European Union of rights abuses, which he denies.</p> <p>Moscow fought two wars with separatists in Chechnya, a mainly Muslim region in southern Russia, after the 1991 break-up of the Soviet Union. But it has since poured huge sums of money into the region to rebuild it and given Kadyrov a large measure of autonomy.</p> <p>The Kremlin describes its actions in Ukraine as a "special operation" to demilitarise and "denazify" its neighbour and on Sunday Russia intensified its attacks in eastern Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/11 Tens of thousands killed in Mariupol
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraines-zelenskiy-says-tens-thousands-killed-mariupol-seeks-military-aid-skorea-2022-04-11/
GIST	<p>KYIV, April 11 (Reuters) - Tens of thousands of people have likely been killed in Russia's assault on the southeastern city of Mariupol, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Monday, as he asked Seoul for any military aid it could provide.</p>

	<p>"Mariupol has been destroyed, there are tens of thousands of dead, but even despite this, the Russians are not stopping their offensive," Zelenskiy said in a video address to South Korean lawmakers.</p> <p>Reuters has confirmed widespread destruction in Mariupol but could not verify the accuracy of his estimate of those killed in the city, which lies between eastern areas of Ukraine held by Russian-backed separatists and Russian-annexed Crimea.</p> <p>Zelenskiy did not specify which weapons he sought, but said South Korea had many weapons that could not only help save the lives of ordinary Ukrainians, but help prevent Russia from attacking other nations.</p> <p>"Ukraine needs various military technologies from airplanes to tanks," he said through an interpreter.</p> <p>"South Korea can help us."</p> <p>South Korean defence minister Suh Wook and Ukrainian defence minister Oleksii Reznikov held a phone conversation on Friday on Reznikov's request. Reznikov thanked Suh for sending humanitarian aid and supplies and asked South Korea to send anti-aircraft weapons, Seoul's defence ministry said on Monday.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/11 East Ukraine focus of Russia attacks
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-prepares-russian-assault-calls-more-support-2022-04-11/
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine, April 11 (Reuters) - Ukrainian troops have repulsed several Russian assaults in the country's east, the focus of a new offensive by the invading forces, British intelligence said on Monday, while President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said this week will be crucial to the course of the war.</p> <p>Austrian leader Karl Nehammer planned to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on Monday and will call for an end to the conflict. It would be Putin's first face-to-face meeting with a European Union leader since Russia's invasion started on Feb. 24.</p> <p>Russian forces were also pushing their offensive to establish control over the southern port city of Mariupol, a key target whose capture would link up areas of Russian control to the west and east.</p> <p>The Russian invasion has left a trail of death of destruction that has drawn condemnation from Western countries and triggered concern about Putin's broader ambitions.</p> <p>About a quarter of Ukraine's 44 million population have been forced from their homes, cities turned into rubble, and thousands of people have been killed or injured - many of them civilians.</p> <p>Russian forces have abandoned their attempt to capture the capital Kyiv but are redoubling their efforts in Ukraine's east. Britain's defence ministry said Russian shelling continued in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.</p> <p>Ukrainian forces had beaten back several assaults and destroyed Russian tanks, vehicles and artillery equipment, it said in its regular intelligence bulletin.</p> <p>The report also said Russia's continued reliance on unguided bombs greatly increased the risk of further civilian casualties.</p> <p>Powerful explosions rocked cities in the south and east and air raid sirens blared out across Ukraine early on Monday.</p> <p>"IT MUST STOP"</p> <p>President Zelenskiy kept up his tireless campaign to generate international support and rally his countrymen, warning the coming week would be important and tense.</p>

"Russian troops will move to even larger operations in the east of our state. They may use even more missiles against us, even more air bombs. But we are preparing for their actions. We will answer." he said in a late night video address.

He was due to address South Korea's parliament by videolink on Monday.

The general staff of Ukraine's armed forces said it was likely the Russians would try to disrupt supply lines and strike at transport infrastructure.

Russia's defence ministry said high-precision missiles had destroyed the headquarters of Ukraine's Dnipro battalion in the town of Zvonetsky.

Reuters could not immediately confirm the reports.

Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer said he would meet Putin on Monday in Moscow.

"We are militarily neutral, but (have) a clear position on the Russian war of aggression against #Ukraine," Nehammer wrote on Twitter. "It must stop! It needs humanitarian corridors, ceasefire & full investigation of war crimes."

Since Russia invaded, Zelenskiy has appealed to Western powers to provide more defence help, and to punish Moscow with tougher sanctions including embargoes on its energy exports.

Zelenskiy said he had confidence in his own armed forces but "unfortunately I don't have the confidence that we will be receiving everything we need" from the United States.

CIVILIAN TOLL

Mounting civilian casualties have triggered widespread international condemnation and new sanctions.

Ludmila Zabaluk, head of the Dmytriv Village Department, north of Kyiv, said dozens of civilian bodies were found in the area.

"There were more than 50 dead people. They shot them from close distance. There's a car where a 17-year-old child was burned, only bones left. A woman had half her head blown off. A bit farther, a man lying near his car was burned alive."

Reuters could not immediately confirm the reports.

Moscow has rejected accusations of war crimes by Ukraine and Western countries. It has repeatedly denied targeting civilians in what it calls a "special operation" to demilitarise and "denazify" its southern neighbour. Ukraine and Western nations have dismissed this as a baseless pretext for war.

ECONOMIC COST

French bank Societe Generale (SOGN.PA) became the latest company to retreat from Russia, agreeing to sell its stake in Rosbank and the Russian lender's insurance subsidiaries to Interros Capital, a firm linked to billionaire Vladimir Potanin.

The Russian invasion has triggered a barrage of financial sanctions from the United States, Europe and Britain, prompting Western companies to sell their Russian assets.

SocGen had faced mounting pressure to cut ties with Russia and end its more than 15-year investment in Rosbank.

	<p>The World Bank on Sunday forecast the war would cause Ukraine's economic output to collapse by 45% this year, with half of its businesses shuttered, grain exports mostly cut off by Russia's naval blockade and destruction rendering economic activity impossible in many areas.</p> <p>The bank forecast Russia's GDP would contract by 11.2% this year due to punishing Western sanctions.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 'Defeat the mandates' rally Los Angeles
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/us/covid-19-peoples-convoy-truckers-mandates/2022/04/10/id/1065140/
GIST	<p>Thousands of people including truckers and firefighters from across the country gathered Sunday outside Los Angeles City Hall to protest vaccination mandates designed to slow the spread of COVID-19.</p> <p>The crowd gathered at Grand Park to hear speakers and performers, while big-rig trucks from the "People's Convoy" were parked on nearby streets. Members of the convoy jammed traffic during a Washington, D.C., protest earlier this year.</p> <p>The peaceful crowd gathered to hear speakers and singers and was similar to a rally held at the same spot last year and to others staged around the country.</p> <p>California battled a deadly winter coronavirus surge linked to the omicron variant but began easing masking and vaccination requirements this year as caseloads and hospitalization rates fell, which public health officials largely attributed to widespread vaccination and other safety measures.</p> <p>However, the rates began to rise again a couple of weeks ago, leading to concerns the new, more infectious BA.2 variant was spreading.</p> <p>Paul Schweit, 31, a New York firefighter and founder of the group Bravest for Choice, flew out with some teachers, transit operators, and others to support local public workers, he said.</p> <p>Schweit said he has been on unpaid leave for five months for failing to comply with New York's vaccine requirement for public employees. He believes he had COVID-19 but recovered.</p> <p>"The people that held out this long believe that this is not about a shot. It's about the freedom to make the choice for yourself for your own bodily autonomy," Schweit said. "We are 100% not anti-vaccine. We support the individual. We believe the threat to the individual is a threat to all freedoms of the people."</p> <p>Los Angeles County and the city require their workers, including firefighters and police and sheriff's deputies, to be fully vaccinated or to have medical or religious exemptions. Relatively few have faced disciplinary action.</p> <p>As of last month, about two dozen employees, including a dozen fire department workers and several police officers, had been fired for violating vaccine mandate rules. The city has successfully fought anti-mandate lawsuits filed on behalf of firefighters and police department workers.</p> <p>Organizers of the protest are opposing several COVID-19-related bills that have been proposed in the Legislature, although the broadest has been put on hold. Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, D-Oakland, shelved her measure that would have required all public or private employees or independent contractors to be vaccinated. Wicks cited easing pandemic conditions and opposition from public safety unions.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/11 China battles Covid surge eastern cities
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-business-guangzhou-beijing-e4c1df45c9906cd6818ddee4d855b3e
GIST	<p>BEIJING (AP) — The manufacturing hub of Guangzhou closed itself to most arrivals Monday as China battles a major COVID-19 surge in its big eastern cities.</p>

Shanghai has taken the brunt of the surge, with another 26,087 cases announced on Monday, only 914 of which showed symptoms. The city of 26 million is under a tight lockdown, with many residents confined to their homes for up to three weeks.

No such lockdown has yet been announced for Guangzhou, a metropolis of 18 million northwest of Hong Kong that is home to many top companies and China's busiest airport. Just 27 cases were reported in the city on Monday.

However, primary and middle schools have been switched to online after an initial 23 local infections were detected last week. An exhibition center was being converted into a makeshift hospital after authorities said earlier they would begin citywide mass testing.

Only citizens with a "definite need" to leave Guangzhou can do so, and only if they test negative for the virus within 48 hours of departure, city spokesperson Chen Bin said in a social media announcement.

China has stuck to its "zero-COVID" strategy of handling outbreaks with strict isolation and mass testing, despite complaints in Shanghai over shortages of food and medical services.

China's government and the entirely state-controlled media are growing increasingly defensive about complaints over the COVID-19 prevention measures, censoring content online and rebuking foreign critics.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian on Sunday said China had "lodged solemn representations with the U.S." after the State Department advised Americans to reconsider traveling to China due to "arbitrary enforcement" of local laws and COVID-19 restrictions, particularly in Hong Kong, Jilin province and Shanghai. U.S. officials cited a risk of "parents and children being separated."

China was "strongly dissatisfied with and firmly opposed to the U.S. side's groundless accusation against China's epidemic response," Zhao said.

Despite that, and indications the hardline policy is being dictated by head of the ruling Communist Party Xi Jinping, China has rejected any notion that its response is political in nature. Xi has demanded social stability above all else in the runup to a key party congress later this year at which he is expected to bestow on himself an unprecedented third-term as party leader.

The English-language China Daily acknowledged that Shanghai's measures are "far from perfect," and pointed to the firing last week of three local officials for failing in their duties. But it said that shouldn't become an "excuse to politicize the event and blame China."

Despite the large number of cases, no new deaths have been reported in the Shanghai wave, possibly because the omicron variant is less deadly than older variants.

City authorities also say they have secured daily supplies for residents, following complaints about deliveries of food and other necessities.

Residents have resorted to group buying of groceries because they are not allowed to leave their buildings, with only partial success in obtaining needed items.

The capital Beijing has seen relatively few restrictions, although the Erjiefang neighborhood including the famed 798 art district has been cordoned off and classified as high risk after eight infections were reported there over the past two weeks.

China is facing one of its worst local outbreaks since the pandemic began. China is still mostly closed to international travel, even as most of the world has sought ways to live with the virus.

HEADLINE	04/10 Covid surging, not even know it?
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/other/covid-could-be-surging-in-the-u-s-right-now-and-we-might-not-even-know-it/ar-AAW3wzG
GIST	<p>The rise of Covid cases in some regions of the U.S., just as testing efforts wane, has raised the specter that the next major wave of the virus may be difficult to detect. In fact, the country could be in the midst of a surge right now and we might not even know it.</p> <p>Testing and viral sequencing are critical to responding quickly to new outbreaks of Covid. And yet, as the country tries to move on from the pandemic, demand for lab-based testing has declined and federal funding priorities have shifted. The change has forced some testing centers to shutter while others have hiked up prices in response to the end of government-subsidized testing programs. People are increasingly relying on at-home rapid tests if they decide to test at all. But those results are rarely reported, giving public health officials little insight into how widespread the virus truly is.</p> <p>“There’s always more spread than we can detect,” said Abraar Karan, an infectious disease physician at Stanford University. “That’s true even more so now than earlier in the pandemic.”</p> <p>Despite groundbreaking scientific advances like vaccines and antivirals, public health experts say the U.S.’s Covid defenses appear to be getting weaker as time goes on, not stronger.</p> <p>"We're in a worse position," said Julia Raifman, an assistant professor of health law, policy and management at Boston University School of Public Health. "We've learned more about the virus and how to address it, and then we haven't done what we need to do to address it."</p> <p>In late February, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began relying on hospital admissions and ICU capacity to determine community-level risk. That was a change from relying on Covid case counts and the percentage of positive tests, which are widely considered a better snapshot of how much virus is circulating in a given community. Several states, including Arizona, Hawaii, Nevada and Ohio have now completely stopped reporting daily Covid data to the CDC, making it more difficult to gauge the progression of the pandemic in those states.</p> <p>According to the CDC, the majority of the country is still considered low risk. Public health experts argue this is misleading though, given hospitalization and death generally occur days to weeks after initial infection. Without widespread testing, that could make it impossible to detect a surge until it’s too late to do anything about it.</p> <p>“CDC is understating and downplaying cases,” said Gregg Gonsalves, an infectious disease expert at Yale’s School of Public Health. “Their alarm bells won’t go off until we see a rise in hospitalizations and deaths, which are lagging indicators.”</p> <p>Transmissible Variant</p> <p>Though omicron tends to cause milder symptoms for healthy, vaccinated people, its transmissibility led to such a huge spike in cases that it caused hospitalization rates to break previous pandemic records. The variant was also responsible for a record number of children going to the hospital. Black people were hospitalized at twice the rate of White people during the surge in New York. Vaccines are extremely effective at preventing severe disease if not always at preventing cases, one of the reasons metrics shifted toward hospitalizations to judge the state of the virus. But failing to track cases creates a blind spot. Experts say it is critical to continue to track them in order to protect vulnerable communities and respond to new waves of the virus before the health system gets overwhelmed.</p> <p>In recent weeks, cases have started to tick up in places like New York, Massachusetts and in Chicago, but conflicting public messaging has caused confusion. National leaders have largely declared victory over the virus, but some local governments are starting to again urge caution. New York City delayed lifting a mask mandate for kids under 5 years of age due to rising cases and the city’s health commissioner recommended New Yorkers return to masking indoors.</p>

Still, even in New York things look vastly different than during the start of prior surges. Gone are the days of long testing lines and sold out antigen tests. And all over the country, pop-up testing centers, once a pandemic mainstay, are starting to disappear. Though state-run testing facilities have continued to operate in some regions, people without health insurance are facing high prices. And as of March 22, the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration is no longer accepting reimbursement claims from health providers for Covid testing either.

At the same time, at-home rapid testing has increased. The problem is, the CDC does not require people to report positive at-home test results so it's rare the results of at-home tests are factored into public health data.

"We are probably underestimating the number of infections we are having now because many of the infections are either without symptoms or minimally symptomatic and you will miss people that do it at home," Anthony Fauci, the top medical adviser to President Joe Biden, told Bloomberg TV on Wednesday.

In New Jersey, for example, Stacy Flanagan, the director of health and human services for Jersey City, said that in the last three months she's had just two people call to report positive at-home tests. Cases are continuing apace in the city with an average of 64 new cases per day, according to health department data. That's almost double the number of daily cases reported a month ago.

"We've heard from only a handful of conscientious people who call us and say, 'I've done a home test and it's positive,'" said Dave Henry, the health officer for more than a dozen towns in Monmouth County, New Jersey.

Public health experts are left to piece together data from a variety of sources. For Rick Bright, a virologist and CEO of the Rockefeller Foundation's Pandemic Prevention Institute, that means using the CDC data as well as a number of other sources to understand Covid's spread. "Unfortunately, we still have to go to a handful of sites to try to patch together what's really happening across the country."

Other metrics such as wastewater surveillance and even air sampling may eventually become helpful alternatives in understanding how much virus is circulating in a community. For weeks, sewer data has shown cases are increasing in some regions of the U.S. — foreshadowing the uptick in positives that places like New York and Massachusetts are now seeing.

In the nation's capital, more than 50 people who attended the elite Gridiron Club dinner on April 2 have tested positive for the coronavirus, the Washington Post reported — at least 8 percent of those who attended. The list of the infected includes the U.S. attorney general, Commerce secretary, aides to Vice President Kamala Harris and first lady Jill Biden, and the sister of the president.

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, who didn't attend the dinner, has also tested positive, raising concern about time she spent in proximity to President Biden prior to her diagnosis.

Home Testing

The White House maintains there's enough data about Covid in circulation to catch the next surge. Tom Inglesby, senior policy advisor for Biden's Covid-19 Response Team, said the CDC gets 850,000 lab-based test results every day, which he believes is sufficient to detect trends in the positivity rate and variant prevalence.

"It is true that there is a larger shift now to switch to over-the-counter testing, that's definitely happening," Inglesby said during a panel discussion. "There are various efforts underway to try to assess whether people might be willing to voluntarily report some fraction of those tests that are being performed at home." One biotech company, Ellume, has rolled out an at-home test and app that automatically reports positive tests to the CDC through a secure, HIPAA-compliant connection.

	<p>Meanwhile the CDC has pledged to ramp up its wastewater surveillance efforts. The agency does not yet have data from sites in every state, so even getting access to some of the sampling already underway could be useful. Environmental surveillance, like many other tools to track Covid, may be at risk without additional funding from Congress. On Tuesday, lawmakers reached an agreement to re-allocate \$10 billion to pandemic preparedness, which press secretary Jen Psaki said would fund “the most immediate needs” such as antivirals and tests. But that bill has yet to clear the Senate.</p> <p>“The information we are getting from the CDC is going to be less reliable, more spotty, and lose momentum,” Bright said. “There’s really big concerns about the lack of sustainable financing to keep the momentum going and finish the job for the surveillance we’re building for pandemic prevention.”</p> <p>There could be a lesson from the 1918 flu pandemic. After cases started to go down following the first two waves of the influenza virus, public sentiment shifted and many health measures were lifted. But in 1919, at the tail end of the pandemic, a fourth wave hit New York city, causing deaths to spike higher than they had during prior waves, according to a government funded study.</p> <p>“These late waves of the pandemics are sometimes the deadliest because people have given up,” said Gonsalves from Yale.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Ukraine calls for more weapons
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/as-war-enters-bloody-new-phase-ukraine-again-calls-for-more-weapons/ar-AAW4xxT?li=BBnb7Kz
GIST	<p>Russian forces bombarded several towns in eastern Ukraine on Sunday, destroying an airport and damaging several civilian targets, as the war careens toward a pivotal new phase. The shift of the war and fears of full-scale military confrontation on open terrain prompted Ukrainian officials to again call for Western alliances to step up weapons supply efforts to strengthen Ukraine’s position on the battlefield.</p> <p>Ukraine is preparing for a “massive attack in the east,” its ambassador to the United States, Oksana Markarova, warned Sunday on CBS’s “Face the Nation.” Of the Russian forces, she said: “There are so many of them and they still have so much equipment. And it looks like they’re going to use all of it. So we are preparing for everything.”</p> <p>Military analysts have been predicting the movement of the war toward the eastern border that Ukraine shares with Russia in an area known as Donbas. The energy-rich region includes territory where pro-Russian forces have been battling the Kyiv government since 2014.</p> <p>Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, cautioned that although leaders have been trumpeting success in driving Russian forces out of Kyiv, “Another battle is coming, the battle for Donbas,” he said Sunday on NBC’s “Meet the Press.”</p> <p>The expected Russian offensive could resemble World War II, Kuleba recently told NATO, with large military maneuvers involving thousands of tanks, armored vehicles, artillery and aircraft. With the atrocities mounting in Ukraine, calls have grown to provide the country with offensive weapons that would allow forces to strike inside Russia. Several foreign allies, including the United Kingdom, have pledged new weapons shipments in recent days to help Ukraine in what is expected to be a tougher battle ahead.</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on CBS’s “60 Minutes” again called on Western countries to step up in providing arms. “They have to supply weapons to Ukraine as if they were defending themselves and their own people,” he said in an interview recorded Wednesday and broadcast Sunday. “If they don’t speed up, it will be very hard for us to hold on against this pressure.”</p> <p>Zelensky urged even tougher sanctions against Russia and warned that Western nations shouldn’t be lulled into complacency thinking that they had staved off World War III by not intervening further.</p>

"I think that today no one in this world can predict what Russia will do. If they invade further into our territory, they will definitely move closer and closer to Europe," he said. "They will only become stronger and less predictable."

Zelensky's message has been relentless since the start of the Russian invasion, when he reportedly said "I need ammunition, not a ride." Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba told NATO leaders in Brussels last week that Zelensky had a threefold agenda: "weapons, weapons and weapons."

The United States has been cautious in its approach to providing armaments directly. The country's focus "is on helping the Ukrainians defend their territory in Ukraine and take territory back," Jake Sullivan, President Biden's national security adviser, said on CBS's "Face the Nation."

"The United States is surging resources, weapons, military equipment, but also diplomatic resources to support the Ukrainians," he said. He also discounted the notion that the United States hadn't stepped up, saying the country has mobilized resources at "unprecedented scope, scale and speed."

He noted that some of the steps include sourcing weapons systems that Ukrainian forces are already familiar with, such as the Soviet-era S-300 air defense system provided by Slovakia, to which the United States contributed a key component. The United States is also exploring systems that would require some training for the Ukrainian forces, Sullivan added.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said Sunday that the United States needs to be more aggressive in aiding Ukraine. "I think the administration has been better, but they've had to be pushed every step of the way to be more aggressive, sooner," McConnell told Fox News.

Backup can't come soon enough as an eight-mile-long convoy of Russian military vehicles was making its way east, according to satellite images captured Friday and made available by Maxar Technologies, a U.S. space technology firm.

As Russia shifts its military focus, officials in the eastern province of Luhansk urged people to evacuate immediately, saying the region could face a "very ugly and very bloody" fight. Sunday's attacks damaged a school and hit two residential buildings, according to Luhansk's governor, Serhiy Haidai, but no deaths were reported.

Already, more than 4.5 million Ukrainians have fled the country since the Russian invasion on Feb. 24, according to [data](#) from the United Nations. That figure is expected to grow as the fighting wears on.

Ukrainians continued to flee eastern Ukraine through humanitarian corridors, though authorities said they were stymied by Russian troops violating cease-fires and holding up buses at checkpoints.

About 2,800 people evacuated conflict areas via humanitarian corridors on Sunday, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said — far fewer than the more than 6,600 who fled conflict zones on Friday.

Amid a backdrop of mounting violence in Ukraine and economic devastation in Russia, President Vladimir Putin is expected to meet Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer on Monday, marking the first time since the invasion that Putin will have met face to face with a European leader. Nehammer visited Ukraine on Saturday and met with Zelensky.

Biden is scheduled to meet virtually with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday to push the country to abandon its neutral stance on the war. India has continued to buy Russian energy supplies, even as many countries around the globe have cut ties to punish Russia for its actions.

Biden and Modi will discuss the consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine and "mitigating its destabilizing impact on global food supply and commodity markets," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Sunday in a statement.

Russian forces have now completely withdrawn from the areas around Kyiv and Chernihiv in the north, where their attempt to launch a sweep into the capital was thwarted by fierce Ukrainian resistance, U.S. officials said. Those troops are being refitted and resupplied, apparently for redeployment to the east, the Pentagon said.

In recent days, Ukrainian military officials said, the Russians have begun pushing south, with the eventual aim of seizing the city where a shelling attack on a train station occurred Friday. At least 57 people have died because of the attack and 109 were injured, according to the city's governor.

Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.) said Sunday during an interview with CNN that the train station attack was "clearly genocide," arguing that European countries that continue to purchase Russian energy supplies are "funding that genocidal campaign."

Ukrainian officials and the state railway company announced new evacuation routes Sunday for civilians in eastern Ukraine. Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said that "all the routes for the humanitarian corridors in the Luhansk region will work as long as there is a cease-fire by the occupying Russian troops."

The refocus to the east, away from the largest cities, could be a challenge for Ukraine's beleaguered forces and an advantage for Russian troops, Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said last week, noting that Russians are more skilled at fighting in rural terrain.

Unlike near Kyiv, where Ukrainian forces were able to hide in forests, the expansive, open spaces of the east will make it harder for the Ukrainians to run guerrilla operations. For their part, Russian forces will be able to muster large mechanized formations of tanks and armored vehicles. Both sides appear positioned to dig in for a long and bloody battle focused in the east that U.S. officials have warned could last months or more.

Accounts of torture, beheadings and bodies used as booby traps for land mines near Ukraine's capital Kyiv, as well as haunting images of mass graves and bound corpses, have increased the urgency of calls for help.

Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission who visited Bucha, Ukraine, last week, said on CNN's "State of the Union" that "a lot has been done, but more has to be done."

It will take at least two weeks for the bodies of those killed in the recent attacks near Kyiv to be recovered from the rubble, Ukrainian Interior Minister Denys Monastyrsky said in a television interview. After 24 hours of sifting through debris in Bucha, workers uncovered more than 6,500 explosive devices in doorways, washing machines, cars and under helmets, Monastyrsky said.

Ukraine has opened 5,600 war-crimes cases involving about 500 Russian leaders, including Putin, since Russia's invasion, prosecutor general Iryna Venediktova said Sunday. But the country will face an uphill battle getting Russian officials into court.

The strike on Friday at a railway station in the east was a Russian missile attack that came as evacuees were waiting to escape an expected onslaught in the region, Venediktova said. A missile fragment found near the train station was inscribed with the words "for the children," in Russian.

"These people just wanted to save their lives, they wanted to be evacuated," Venediktova said, adding that the country has "evidence" it was a Russian strike.

The exodus from Ukraine has caused an outpouring of global support, with donors pledging 9.1 billion euros (\$10 billion) for refugees at an event Saturday convened by Canada and the European Commission.

Pope Francis called for an “Easter truce” and “peace” in Ukraine during a Palm Sunday Mass in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican.

“Put the weapons down,” he said, according to Reuters, as tens of thousands of people listened to his address. “Let an Easter truce start. But not to rearm and resume combat, but a truce to reach peace through real negotiations.”

Francis, who has repeatedly denounced Russia’s invasion but has not directly referenced Russia or Putin, said the “folly of war” leads people to commit “senseless acts of cruelty,” the Associated Press reported.

In Russia, those who speak out against the war are under increasing threat. At least four teachers have been turned in by students or parents for antiwar speech, in some of the starkest examples of the government’s quest to identify and punish individuals who criticize the invasion.

It’s a campaign with dark Soviet echoes, inspired last month by Putin, who praised Russians for their ability to identify “scum and traitors” and “spit them out like a fly.”

After weeks of denial, Russian officials have acknowledged recently the scores of military casualties suffered by their forces. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the “significant losses of troops” were a “huge tragedy,” an unprecedented admission from a Russian government that has largely insisted the operation in Ukraine is going according to plan.

Now, as it seeks to rebuild its depleted forces for the next phase of battle, Russia is turning to retired soldiers, according to an intelligence briefing Sunday from the United Kingdom’s ministry of defense.

“The Russian armed forces seek to bolster troop numbers with personnel discharged from military service since 2012,” the ministry said. “Efforts to generate more fighting power also include trying to recruit from the unrecognised Transnistria region of Moldova.”

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HEADLINE	04/10 Tax season ends in one week
SOURCE	https://www.foxbusiness.com/money/tax-season-ends-april-18
GIST	<p>The 2022 tax season is quickly coming to an end, but millions of Americans still need to file their returns to the IRS.</p> <p>As of April 1, the tax-collecting agency has processed more than 89 million returns and issued more than 63 million refunds worth a collective \$204 billion. The average payment so far is worth \$3,352 – much larger than last year's average of about \$2,800 – though it may change by the April 18 deadline.</p> <p>If you haven’t filed yet, here’s what you need to know:</p> <p>Taxes are due on April 18</p> <p>The tax-filing season will end on April 18 this year for most individuals, rather than the usual deadline of April 15, because that's when Emancipation Day will be observed in Washington, D.C.</p> <p>But taxpayers can request an extension until Oct. 15</p> <p>If you’re an individual, you can request an extension online by filling out Form 4868 using the IRS’ “Free File” tool. You need to submit the form by April, or print the form and mail it to the IRS address for your state, making sure it's postmarked by April 18. Once you file the extension, you have until Oct. 17, 2022, to file your taxes.</p> <p>However, there are pros and cons to requesting an extension.</p>

It can give filers more time to thoroughly review their return and take advantage of all the tax benefits, like various deductions and credits, that are available to them to help them reduce their liability.

By pushing back the filing date, you can also avoid a failure-to-file penalty – an extra 5% per month on the unpaid amount, which can add up to 25% of the tax due. If you file for an extension, you have until Oct. 15 before the penalty starts accruing.

Experts caution that filing for an extension does not mean you can delay paying the [government](#) the taxes that are owed.

"Extension to file is not an extension to pay," Eric Bronnenkant, head of tax at online financial adviser Betterment, told FOX Business. "A common misconception is that you get more time to pay, and that's not true."

You should file your taxes online if possible

Filing your taxes electronically is the fastest way to get a refund, according to the [IRS](#), especially as the agency works its way through a backlog of paper returns that built up during its closure earlier this year in response to the pandemic.

The agency issues nine out of 10 refunds in less than 21 days. In the 2021 filing season, about 96% of taxpayers filed their returns online.

Your refund might be delayed

There are a number of reasons that your refund could be delayed. Math errors or typos are a common culprit.

If you filed a paper return, it could be stuck in a processing queue as the IRS works through a backlog of 7 million unprocessed individual returns.

"It's taking us longer than normal to process mailed correspondence and more than 21 days to issue refunds for certain mailed and e-filed 2020 tax returns that require review," the IRS said recently.

The tax-collecting agency has also identified other frequent mistakes, such as: choosing the wrong filing status, not answering a question on trading virtual currency, forgetting to report all types of taxable income including unemployment benefits, making small typos in the name, birth date and Social Security entries, or mailing the return to the wrong address.

There are additional challenges this year for filers that are related to the COVID-19 stimulus payments and the expanded child tax credit. Although filers do not owe money on the stimulus payments, they still need to correctly enter the amount they received on their returns – which needs to match IRS records.

There are "far more than 10 million" Americans who have failed to reconcile the two stimulus payments they were sent in 2020, IRS Commissioner Chuck Rettig said recently while testifying before the House Ways and Means Committee.

The IRS has similar requirements for the child tax credit: Because at least half of the enhanced credit will be paid out as a lump sum when parents receive their 2021 tax return, recipients are required to accurately reconcile the credit they already received when filing their taxes this year. The information is pertinent to determining how much more money families receive from the credit when they fill out [Schedule 8812 and Form 1040](#).

There's still time to contribute to your IRA

The deadline for Americans to make contributions to their IRA for 2021 is April 18. The maximum annual contribution for traditional and Roth IRAs for most Americans is \$6,000. If you're over the age of 50, you can add another \$1,000.

	Traditional IRA contributions may be tax-deductible – withdrawals are typically taxable – although there are several complicating factors, including income limits and whether you or your spouse are covered by a workplace retirement plan.
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HEADLINE	04/11 Study: CA, NY, NJ handled Covid worst
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/politics/california-new-york-covid-lockdowns-worst-florida-best-study
GIST	<p>A new study has graded states by how well they handled the coronavirus pandemic and its subsequent restrictions and lockdowns, showing a stark contrast between liberal and conservative states.</p> <p>The Committee To Unleash Prosperity study compared state performance on metrics including the economy, education, and mortality from the virus, and examined how states and their respective governments handled the pandemic response.</p> <p>"Shutting down their economies and schools was by far the biggest mistake governors and state officials made during Covid, particularly in blue states," Steve Moore, co-founder of the Committee to Unleash Prosperity, told Fox News Digital. "We hope the results of this study will persuade governors not to close schools and businesses the next time we have a new virus variant."</p> <p>New York, California, New Jersey, and Illinois were among the worst in dealing with the coronavirus, performing "poorly on every measure," the report said.</p> <p>These states "had high age-adjusted death rates; they had high unemployment and significant GDP losses, and they kept their schools shut down much longer than almost all other states," the report added.</p> <p>States like Utah, Nebraska, Vermont, Montana, South Dakota and Florida — all governed by Republicans — received the highest scores in the study, first through sixth, respectively. In fact, 13 of the top 15 states in the study are governed by Republicans. (Montana had a Democratic governor until the 2020 election).</p> <p>The study also found no correlation in those states that enacted stringent travel, vocation, and dining restrictions with lower death totals.</p> <p>"The study verifies other studies which have found that locking down businesses, stores, churches, schools, and restaurants had almost no impact on health outcomes across states," the report determined. "States with strict lockdowns had virtually no better performance in Covid death rates than states that remained mostly open for business."</p> <p>Throughout the first two years of the pandemic, liberal states were widely applauded for their restrictions while conservative states were lambasted.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Ukraine draft dodgers' guilt, shame
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/10/world/asia/ukraine-draft-dodgers.html
GIST	<p>CHISINAU, Moldova – Vova Klever, a young, successful fashion photographer from Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, did not see himself in this war.</p> <p>"Violence is not my weapon," he said.</p> <p>So shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine in late February and Ukraine prohibited men of military age from leaving the country, Mr. Klever sneaked out to London.</p> <p>His mistake, which would bring devastating consequences, was writing to a friend about it.</p> <p>The friend betrayed his trust and posted their conversation on social media. It went viral, and Ukrainians all over the internet exploded with anger and resentment.</p>

“You are a walking dead person,” one Twitter message said. “I’m going to find you in any corner in the world.”

The notion of people — especially men — leaving war-torn Ukraine for safe and comfortable lives abroad has provoked a moral dilemma among Ukrainians that turns on one of the most elemental decisions humans can make: fight or flee.

Thousands of Ukrainian men of military age have left the country to avoid participating in the war, according to records from regional law enforcement officials and interviews with people inside and outside Ukraine. Smuggling rings in Moldova, and possibly other European countries, have been doing a brisk business. Some people have paid up to \$15,000 for a secret night-time ride out of Ukraine, Moldovan officials said.

The draft dodgers are the vast exception. That makes it all the more complicated for them — morally, socially and practically. Ukrainian society has been mobilized for war against a much bigger enemy, and countless Ukrainians without military experience have volunteered for the fight. To maximize its forces, the Ukrainian government has taken the extreme step of prohibiting men 18 to 60 from leaving, with few exceptions.

All this has forced many Ukrainian men who don’t want to serve into taking illegal routes into Hungary, Moldova and Poland and other neighboring countries. Even among those convinced they fled for the right reasons, some said they felt guilty and ashamed.

“I don’t think I can be a good soldier right now in this war,” said a Ukrainian computer programmer named Volodymyr, who left shortly after the war began and did not want to disclose his last name, fearing repercussions for avoiding military service.

“Look at me,” Volodymyr said, as he sat in a pub in Warsaw drinking a beer. “I wear glasses. I am 46. I don’t look like a classic fighter, some Rambo who can fight Russian troops.”

He took another sip and stared into his glass.

“Yes, I am ashamed,” he said. “I ran away from this war, and it is probably my crime.”

Ukrainian politicians have threatened to put draft dodgers in prison and confiscate their homes. But within Ukrainian society, even as cities continue to be pummeled by Russian bombs, the sentiments are more divided.

A meme recently popped up with the refrain, “Do what you can, where you are.” It’s clearly meant to counter negative feelings toward those who left and assure them they can still contribute to the war effort. And Ukrainian women and children, the vast majority of the refugees, face little backlash.

But that’s not the case for young men, and this is what blew up on the young photographer.

In mid-March, Olga Lepina, who has worked as a modeling agent, said Mr. Klever sent her husband a message saying he had made it to London.

Her husband wrote back: “Wow! How?”

“Through Hungary with the smugglers for 5k \$,” Mr. Klever replied, according to screenshots of the conversation provided by Ms. Lepina. “But that’s just between us, shush!”

Ms. Lepina said she and Mr. Klever had been friends for years. She even went to his wedding. But as the war drew near, she said, Mr. Klever became intensely patriotic and a bit of an online bully. When she

found out he had avoided service, she was so outraged that she posted screenshots of the conversation on Instagram.

“For me, it was a hypocrisy to leave the country and pay money for this,” she explained, adding, “He needs to be responsible for his words.”

Mr. Klever, who is in his 20s, was bombarded with death threats. Some Ukrainians resented that he used his wealth to get out and called it “cheating.”

Responding to emailed questions, Mr. Klever did not deny skipping out on his service and said that he had poor eyesight and had “been through a lot lately.”

“You can’t even imagine the hatred,” he said.

Mr. Klever gave conflicting accounts of how exactly he exited the country and declined to provide details. But for many other Ukrainian men, Moldova has become the favorite trap door.

Moldova shares a nearly 800-mile border with western Ukraine. And unlike Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, Moldova is not part of the European Union, which means it has significantly fewer resources to control its frontiers. It is one of Europe’s poorest countries and has been a hub of human trafficking and organized crime.

Within days of the war erupting, Moldovan officials said, Moldovan gangs posted advertisements on Telegram, a popular messaging service in Eastern Europe, offering to arrange cars, even minibuses, to spirit out draft dodgers.

Law enforcement officials said the typical method was for the smugglers and the Ukrainians to select a rendezvous point along Moldova’s “green border,” the term used for the unfenced border areas, and meet late at night.

On a recent night, a squad of Moldovan border guards trudged across a flat, endless wheat field, their boots sinking in the mud, looking for draft dodgers. There was no border post on the horizon, just the faint lights of a Ukrainian village and the sounds of dogs barking in the darkness.

Out here, one can just walk into and out of Ukraine.

Moldovan officials said that since late February they had broken up more than 20 smuggling rings, including a few well-known criminal enterprises. In turn, they have apprehended 1,091 people crossing the border illegally. Officials said all were Ukrainian men.

Once caught, these men have a choice. If they don’t want to be sent back, they can apply for asylum in Moldova, and cannot be deported.

But if they do not apply for asylum, they can be turned over to the Ukrainian authorities, who, Moldovan officials said, have been pressuring them to send the men back. The vast majority of those who entered illegally, around 1,000, have sought asylum, and fewer than 100 have been returned, Moldovan officials said. Two thousand other Ukrainian men who have entered Moldova legally have also applied for asylum.

Volodymyr Danuliv is one of them. He refuses to fight in the war, though it’s not the prospect of dying that worries him, he said. It is the killing.

“I can’t shoot Russian people,” said Mr. Danuliv, 50.

He explained that his siblings had married Russians and that two of his nephews were serving in the Russian Army — in Ukraine.

“How can I fight in this war?” he asked. “I might kill my own family.”

Myroslav Hai, an official with Ukraine’s military reserve, conceded, “There are people who evade mobilization, but their share in comparison with volunteers is not so large.” Other Ukrainian officials said men ideologically or religiously opposed to war could serve in another way, for example as cooks or drivers.

But none of the more than a dozen men interviewed for this article seemed interested. Mr. Danuliv, a businessman from western Ukraine, said he wanted no part in the war. When asked if he feared being ostracized or shamed, he shook his head.

“I didn’t kill anyone. That’s what’s important to me,” he said. “I don’t care what people say.”

What happens when the war ends? How much resentment will surface toward those who left? These are questions Ukrainians, men and women, are beginning to ask.

When Ms. Lepina shamed Mr. Klever, she was no longer in Ukraine herself. She had left, too, for France, with her husband, who is not a Ukrainian citizen. Every day, she said, she wrestles with guilt.

“People are suffering in Ukraine, and I want to be there to help them, to support them,” she said. “But at the same time I’m safe and I want to be here.”

“It’s a very ambiguous, complicated feeling,” she said.

And she knows she will be judged.

“Of course there will be some people who divide Ukrainian nationals between those who left and those who stayed,” she said. “I am ready for that.”

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HEADLINE	04/10 Rural hospitals grapple staff shortages
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/washingtons-rural-hospitals-grapple-with-staff-shortages-as-competition-gives-big-cities-advantage/
GIST	<p>Roxeanne Huddleston has worked at Newport Hospital, 50 miles northeast of Spokane, her entire career as a nurse after her family relocated from the Seattle area nearly 20 years ago. Her experience in nursing school took her through the large hospitals in Spokane, but she knew she wanted something smaller.</p> <p>“I like to get to know my patients and have good relationships with them and their families,” Huddleston said. “I want to make a difference in their lives.”</p> <p>She was hired initially at Newport in long-term care and worked her way through the different departments at the hospital and clinic.</p> <p>This was how it was when there was not a nursing shortage: Nurses worked their way up to more challenging parts of the hospital, adding skill sets as they progressed in their career.</p> <p>COVID-19 has changed that.</p> <p>Today, a nursing-school graduate could get a job in an emergency department or even an intensive-care unit, something that used to take years. That’s because hospitals are eager to build up their workforce after two years of a pandemic has led many nurses to look for more lucrative traveling jobs, or leave the health care profession altogether.</p> <p>Huddleston said she never thought of leaving during the pandemic.</p>

“I believe that when you work in rural nursing, you’re a part of a family, and you really do care about each other,” she said. “When someone here is sick, if an employee is sick, we reach out to them.”

But the pandemic brought a new level of intensity to the job that even veterans like Huddleston, who has been a nurse now for 17 years, hadn’t seen.

The pandemic and staffing

On the COVID ward, nurses became close to families. Huddleston recalls attending the funeral of one patient, whose partner invited hospital staff to attend. It was a reminder of the difference she and her colleagues make each day, even if it didn’t feel like it at times during the pandemic.

At Newport Hospital, the vaccine mandate led to 21 resignations. While the mandate was cited as the reason, some of the nurses were making moves to other states, retiring early or switching jobs.

This happened during the peak of the delta wave, the worst part of the pandemic for the hospital, and leaders were forced to rely on contracts to bring in more workers.

But this didn’t mean hiring agencies could always provide nurses during surges, and Newport Hospital’s leadership got creative.

Instead of hiring contracted workers, Newport hired its own temporary nursing staff. When the delta variant hit Northeast Washington, rates for traveling nurses went well over \$100 an hour, said Theresa Hollinger, chief nursing officer at Newport Hospital.

When staffing agencies charge hospitals these amounts, nurses don’t get the full cut, however, and Hollinger said Newport Hospital posted a temporary position for \$100 an hour to cover their night shift, where they really needed support. In essence, they cut out the middle man. And it worked.

“It’s been really successful. In fact, we’re hoping to continue that process beyond just now,” Hollinger said.

To maintain equity with full-time staff nurses, they also got double-time pay when they worked over their allotted hours.

Even as the latest COVID wave has receded, rural hospitals are struggling to fill their vacant nursing roles.

Rural hospital administrators say they still aren’t back to pre-pandemic staffing levels, which is why they voiced concerns over a proposal at the Legislature that would have required them to hire even more staff.

Rural opposition to safe-staffing legislation

That proposal to impose nurse-to-patient staffing ratios on hospitals worked its way through the Washington House and Senate earlier this year before eventually stalling.

Unions representing health care workers advocated for the staffing standards as a way to keep nurses in the workplace and help stem the tide of health care workers leaving the health sector.

The Washington State Hospital Association opposed the legislation, and several rural facilities were concerned that their challenges of getting more staff would get even more difficult if the legislation passed.

One version of the bill meant that Lincoln Hospital in Davenport — a rural community 35 miles west of Spokane — would have needed to recruit at least a dozen additional nurses, said Tyson Lacy, the hospital’s CEO.

“We’re already six nurses short, and I would have needed 22 nurses total, and they don’t exist,” Lacy said.

A rural hospital recruiting more than a few nurses is a lofty goal, especially for those facilities far from any major city or urban center.

At Coulee Medical Center in Grand Coulee, there have been open nursing positions for years at a time, said Ramona Hicks, its CEO.

“I’ve found two recruiters and spent a lot of money to recruit nurses to the area and hire them, and have had zero response,” Hicks said.

Rural hospital administrators were concerned not only with the staffing ratios proposed in the bills, but with the limitations the legislation put on on-call hours for staff, which are relied upon for emergency surgeries.

At Coulee Medical Center and the Olympic Peninsula’s Forks Community Hospital, birthing services were in jeopardy the way on-call hours were structured in the safe-staffing legislation, because a surgery team must be on call during births. Other rural hospitals expected that they would have had to cut service lines or bed capacity to meet the staffing ratios in the proposed legislation.

Growing their own

Many rural hospitals are focusing on recruiting locally instead of recruiting nursing-school graduates away from larger cities or competing with larger hospitals.

In Davenport, there’s a nursing-assistant program based at the high school to get students interested in health care. Lacy said the students get high-school credit for their nursing-aid classes, and they can sit for their CNA exam after the course. One graduate of that course is headed to nursing school, while another is becoming an EMT, he said.

They are trying to bring that student in nursing school back to do clinical rotations at the rural hospital. Recruiting and retaining local community members to work in health care is the strategy many leaders described.

“That’s how rural (hospitals) are going to survive,” Lacy said.

A nursing-school student who has completed one clinical rotation can become a licensed nurse tech in a hospital, qualified to perform only the skills they have learned so far in school. At Newport Hospital, Hollinger is focusing on hiring nurse techs on a more frequent schedule that they make themselves to coordinate around their nursing-school requirements.

The idea is that exposure will help them not only become competent in their nursing skills, but come back to work at the hospital once they complete their program.

“The hope is to grow our own nurses, to help them develop, take care of them, and help them become competent in their field so they feel good about being here,” Hollinger said.

Fixing the pipeline

Rural hospitals already have challenges with recruitment, but now, with larger hospitals offering lucrative sign-on bonuses, it has become tougher.

“If it’s hard for Providence and big systems ... it’s that much worse for rural hospitals,” said Bevan Briggs, assistant professor and academic director at the Washington State University College of Nursing.

Fixing the nursing shortage requires multiple kinds of interventions and investments.

The Legislature passed some funding and proposals to help fix the nursing pipeline this session, but there are still gaps that make it challenging for nursing schools to graduate more nurses.

	<p>Nursing schools need to be able to accept more students, Briggs said. This is done by increasing the number of educators, something challenging to do when you need a master's degree to teach and then, in some settings, take a significant pay cut.</p> <p>"Faculty salaries for nursing are about what a new grad RN makes, and that's one of the issues we've been trying to deal with," Briggs said.</p> <p>The Legislature has passed salary increases for some nursing instructors at community and technical colleges in the state, but not at four-year university nursing programs such as WSU.</p> <p>Briggs hopes more can be done next year.</p> <p>"Nurses are saying they're burned out; and hospitals are saying resources are stretched thin; and colleges of nursing are saying, we're trying to help out — but we don't have what we need to help out," Briggs said. "The whole system is completely stressed."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Judge: military can't discharge HIV positive
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/judge-rules-us-military-cant-discharge-hiv-positive-troops/
GIST	<p>RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — U.S. service members who are HIV-positive cannot be discharged or barred from becoming an officer solely because they're infected with the virus, a federal judge in Virginia ruled. Advocates say it's one of the strongest rulings in years for people living with HIV.</p> <p>The cases involved two service members that the Air Force attempted to discharge, as well as Sgt. Nick Harrison of the D.C. Army National Guard, who was denied a position in the Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps.</p> <p>U.S. District Judge Leonie Brinkema said in a written order dated April 6 that her ruling bars the military from taking those actions against the plaintiffs and any other asymptomatic HIV-positive service member with an undetectable viral load "because they are classified as ineligible for worldwide deployment ... due to their HIV-positive status."</p> <p>Peter Perkowski, an attorney for the plaintiffs, called it "a landmark victory — probably the biggest ruling in favor of people living with HIV in the last 20 years."</p> <p>"The military was the last employer in the country that had a policy against people living with HIV. Every other employer — including first responders — is subject to rules that prohibit discrimination based on HIV status," he said.</p> <p>The Department of Defense did not immediately respond to an emailed request seeking comment on the ruling or whether it intends to appeal.</p> <p>The airmen, identified by pseudonyms in the 2018 lawsuit, argued that major advancements in treatment mean they can easily be given appropriate medical care and present no real risk of transmission to others.</p> <p>In 2020, the Richmond-based 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a preliminary injunction barring the discharge of the airmen. In its ruling, the three-judge panel said the military's rationale for prohibiting deployment of HIV-positive service members was "outmoded and at odds with current science." The appeals court ruling left the injunction in place while their lawsuit was being heard.</p> <p>The Department of Justice argued before the 4th Circuit that the Air Force determined the two airmen could no longer perform their duties because their career fields required them to deploy frequently and because their condition prevented them from deploying to the U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility, where most airmen are expected to go. Central Command, which governs military</p>

operations in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia, prohibits personnel with HIV from deploying without a waiver.

The DOJ acknowledged that treatment lowers the risk of transmitting HIV, but said the risk is amplified on the battlefield where soldiers can often come into contact with blood.

An attorney for the airmen argued during a 2019 hearing that the odds of transmitting HIV in combat are infinitesimal and should not limit their deployment or lead to their discharge.

In its written ruling, the 4th Circuit panel said a ban on deployment may have been justified at a time when HIV treatment was less effective at managing the virus and reducing the risk of transmission.

“But any understanding of HIV that could justify this ban is outmoded and at odds with current science. Such obsolete understandings cannot justify a ban, even under a deferential standard of review and even according appropriate deference to the military’s professional judgments,” Judge James Wynn Jr. wrote in the unanimous 2020 ruling.

Brinkema said in this month’s written order that she had temporarily sealed her ruling in the case to give both sides a chance to seek redactions within 14 days. The judge ordered the secretary of the Air Force to rescind the decision to discharge the two airmen and ordered the Army to rescind its decision denying Harrison’s application to commission into JAG, and to reevaluate those decisions in light of her ruling.

Kara Ingelhart, senior attorney at Lambda Legal, one of the groups that brought the lawsuits, said in a news release that the ruling knocks down a barrier to preventing people living with AIDS from becoming officers, and “brings an end to the military’s ongoing discrimination against the approximately 2,000 service members currently serving while living with HIV.”

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HEADLINE	04/09 Alaska Airlines suffers travel chaos
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/boeing-aerospace/travel-chaos-from-pilot-shortage-shreds-alaska-airlines-reputation/
GIST	<p>En route to the airport from their Bainbridge Island home early on April 1 for a long-planned trip to a wedding in Tampa, Florida, the Abarbanel family received a notification from Alaska Airlines: Their flight was canceled.</p> <p>That weekend and in the days after, a pilot shortage at Alaska caused hundreds of such last-minute flight cancellations that fueled anger among tens of thousands of passengers delayed or stranded.</p> <p>The chaos was the last straw for the Abarbanels, who said they had three previous Alaska flights this year either canceled or changed at short notice.</p> <p>Having abandoned all hope of reaching Alaska customer service — with a hold time of 10 hours — they finally got to Tampa on Monday via alternate flights they booked for themselves on Delta and JetBlue. They paid substantial additional hotel and rental car expenses and lost two nights already paid for in a beachfront condo.</p> <p>“Our journey planned well ahead turned into the trip from hell,” Mary Beth Abarbanel, a retiree who traveled with her husband and adult son, wrote in an email “Longtime Alaska customer, with a bank of money and miles. Alaska is now losing our business.”</p> <p>The airline may have a long climb to get above the clouds now shrouding its reputation for warm and reliable service.</p> <p>Constance von Muehlen, Alaska’s executive vice president and chief operating officer, attributed the schedule meltdown to a series of one-off setbacks over several months.</p>

The surge of the omicron variant of the coronavirus and the snowstorm in December delayed the flow of pilots from the airline's training pipeline, she said, and created "a unique confluence of events."

"We should have recognized this sooner and made the necessary schedule adjustments," she conceded in an email to employees on Tuesday.

Yet the pilot union, the Air Line Pilots Association, had long warned management a staffing crisis was coming.

"We started late last fall, then going into the events in December with the snowstorm, saying, 'You are not properly staffed,' " Will McQuillen, ALPA's Alaska council chairperson, said in an interview. "This airline should have the elasticity to be able to respond to these events. It's running too lean."

Executives at Alaska dismiss this as labor posturing during the protracted and increasingly bitter pilot contract negotiations.

Yet a video of an internal Alaska pilot meeting shows Alaska executives, two weeks before the meltdown on April 1, were keenly aware of the imminence of an acute pilot shortage and the threat of chaos.

At that mid-March meeting, one employee asked: "Reserve coverage for next month appears to be insufficient to staff the airline. What's the plan?"

John Ladner, vice president of flight operations, responded that pilots resigning to join other airlines had reduced the number of reserve pilots on call to fill gaps in scheduling.

"We are seeing attrition. You're definitely seeing the impact with the low number of reserves that we have periodically," Ladner told his pilots. "April is looking like it's going to be a difficult month."

Still, no urgent action was taken to stanch the deluge of cancellations that hit April 1.

In the aftermath of that disaster, Alaska said it will now proactively reduce its flying schedule by 2% through June "to match our current pilot capacity" of about 3,100 pilots. That's about 24 flights per day, freeing up 24 flight crews for redeployment.

With that, the airline hopes to avoid more day-of-flight cancellations.

"We will let you know in advance if your itinerary is impacted by these schedule adjustments," the airline promised travelers in a statement on its website Thursday.

As for the distress caused to stranded passengers last weekend, von Muehlen said, "we're deeply sorry for the challenges that they might have had."

Pilot disaffection

Alaska is short not only of pilots but also of flight attendants and customer service reps.

In a March 28 video staff meeting, an employee cited frustration among overworked reservation agents who because of the long wait times were "taking verbal abuse not bad enough to hang up on a guest but enough to put agents in tears and even to the point of quitting at a high rate."

Ironically, the staff shortages hit the carrier just over a week after management touted expansive growth plans at its annual Investor Day in New York.

Management's growth story, claiming Alaska can emerge from the pandemic stronger than ever and capture bigger markets, is aimed at raising the stock price.

In New York, the leadership projected Alaska will grow its seat capacity between 4% and 8% annually through 2025 and by the end of next year will be flying 24 more mainline jets than it had at the start of this year. Since Alaska must hire 12 pilots for every extra plane it adds to the fleet, that's close to 300 additional pilots needed for that expansion alone, not accounting for retirements and attrition.

In an interview in early March, Nat Pieper, Alaska's senior vice president responsible for the jet fleet and finances, said the current industrywide pilot shortage is a concern given the airline's growth aspirations.

"We've got the balance sheet to do it. We've got airplanes coming," said Pieper. "But you've obviously got to have crew to be able to do that."

All U.S. airlines are facing challenging labor shortages as air travel recovers. All cut staff during the steep pandemic downturn and some employees did not return.

Some pilots close to the retirement age of 65 chose to quit early during the pandemic. At Alaska, 137 of its most experienced veterans elected early retirement out of about 3,100 total pilots.

Making the situation worse at Alaska, the shortage means pilots have lots of options and Alaska has seen significant attrition this year as pilots left to join other carriers.

In the first three months of the year, 27 line pilots left for other airlines. In addition, 22 hired as pilots but who had not completed their training jumped ship to another carrier.

There's also a significant no-show factor for those pilot training classes, as candidates accept an offer when Alaska calls, then switch when a different airline makes an offer.

"A couple of weeks prior to class, pilots are backing out of offers," Scott Day, system chief pilot at Alaska, told the pilots in that mid-March pilot meeting with Ladner. Day added that Alaska is now overfilling the classes by about 10% to compensate for this attrition.

ALPA's McQuillen said Friday five more pilots resigned in the past week to go elsewhere, bringing the total to 54 pilots who have moved to greener pastures so far this year.

Last year, 43 Alaska pilots resigned in the entire 12 months and in pre-pandemic years, as pilots switched airlines for family reasons or geographic location, a figure of around 20 resignations was more typical, McQuillen said.

The union says the level of attrition is evidence that Alaska has fallen behind the major airlines not only in pilot pay but in the crew scheduling rules that determine if a pilot's work schedule is flexible or not.

And they complain that management won't commit to limits on the percentage of flights flown by smaller regional jets flown by lower-paid pilots — which they see as a long-term threat to career security.

In the current deadlocked contract talks, both sides expect the pilot pay to be raised to the current market level at other airlines. It's the "quality of life" crew scheduling and career security issues that are blocking a deal.

Pilots "will gravitate towards the carrier that offers the greatest quality of life and career security," said McQuillen.

Contract talks at an impasse

Hundreds of pilots turned out to picket for a new contract at Alaska's Seattle base near Seattle-Tacoma International Airport on April 1 and more than 1,000 took part across its network hubs.

While many passengers assumed the flight cancellations were a result of this show of disaffection, that's not the case. Those were off-duty pilots. There's no strike.

The company clarified on its website that “This informational picket was not the cause of our cancellations.”

Instead, von Muehlen and Jeff Severns, managing director of flight operations training, cited the big shortfall in the new-hire pilots who graduated from Alaska’s training program for April 1 compared to the expected number.

“We started new hires in October, really filled the schoolhouse November, December, and then every month thereafter,” Severns said. “When Omicron hit in December ... we saw delays with students in the schoolhouse down sick with omicron, with instructors not being available.”

He added that the operational portion of the training for new-hire pilots, when they fly along with a very experienced pilot, was impacted by the December weather delays and cancellations.

The result was Alaska had 63 fewer pilots ready to fly on April 1 than was planned for when the schedule was set in January.

The union believes the problems run deeper. McQuillen said the no-show rates for training and the loss of pilots to other airlines “has nothing to do with omicron or weather.”

When the pilot contract bargaining continued this week before a federal mediator, the talks went nowhere and broke off a day early on Thursday. The impasse seems worse than ever.

Ladner in a message to the pilots that night complained of “ALPA’s unwillingness to find common ground.”

“To be candid, we are unsure of our next steps and are waiting to hear from our mediator,” Ladner wrote.

The union sent out an even stronger message. Though federal labor law makes it extremely difficult for airline pilots to strike — the government can impose a cooling off period and even force a settlement — McQuillen hinted that might lie ahead.

“It’s our strong recommendation that Alaska pilots prepare financially for a much bigger fight to achieve our collective goals,” he wrote to his members.

McQuillen on Saturday clarified that “a strike might lie ahead if legally sanctioned.”

He said via email that if the federal mediator decides “that the two parties are at an impasse, he can release us to a 30-day cooling off period. Following that... and only then... are we legally allowed to strike.”

Filling in the shortages

The 2% reduction in flying over the next few months should “see us back on track,” said Alaska spokesperson Alexa Rudin.

“We’re calibrating our capacity to match the number of pilots,” she said. “The next time you go to fly, you can expect us to be reliable and your flight will go on time.”

Acknowledging that the crew shortage should have been flagged earlier, von Muehlen said the pilot crew planning team must now report directly to her.

And responding to the widespread anger over the customer service phone delays, she said that passengers affected by a cancellation should not call the regular support numbers. She said a phone number provided on the cancellation notification is a special line for which “the hold times are minutes.”

Von Muehlen said Alaska has hired 388 pilots since October. These largely come from regional airlines flying smaller jets or turboprop planes and take several months to train.

Alaska is training more pilot trainers for the new-hire classes and more check pilots for the operational training. Von Muehlen said she expects 30 new hires to graduate and become line pilots this month.

A complication is that because Alaska is phasing out its Airbus A320 jets, it has about 350 A320 pilots who will have to be retrained in batches to fly Boeing 737s.

This takes up scarce training resources. Alaska currently has just one 737 MAX full flight simulator. By the summer it expects to have three.

At the March 28 employee meeting, von Muehlen said 360 newly hired and trained flight attendants would join the line on April 1.

"I certainly expect the flight attendants to be in a much better place by June," she said. "Likewise, for our pilots, I expect that by the summer we will be in a better place."

Rudin said Alaska will work with all passengers whose travel plans were ruined to sort out compensation for extra expenses and the trouble caused.

"I've checked with our care team and they feel very confident that they're working with all of our guests who are impacted," she said. "I think we're in good shape there."

Yet Alaska's customer support remains glacially slow. The online chat function at the airline website on Friday cited a response time of one hour and hold time on the customer service phone line was 5 to 7 hours.

As for the Abarbanel, after about two hours on the phone from Florida, "mostly on hold," Alaska booked them on a flight home Sunday.

"They sent me a single coupon for a \$100 discount, good for one year," Mary Beth Abarbanel said via email. "Reservations said they could not tell us what was refunded and what was not."

For that, she was told she needs to contact customer service.

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HEADLINE	04/08 Omicron's new XE subvariant
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/the-new-omicron-subvariant-xe-is-getting-attention-how-concerned-should-we-be/
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES — Even as the highly contagious omicron subvariant BA. 2 is increasingly dominating the U.S., an even more potentially contagious subvariant, XE, has attracted the attention of global scientists.</p> <p>Early estimates as noted by the World Health Organization say XE may be 10% more transmissible than BA. 2, but it's too soon to say whether XE will become the next prolific omicron subvariant that will become another household name. The British government has also noted that data showing XE's growth rate advantage over BA. 2 have not remained consistent, so more data will be needed to assess XE's likely future trajectory.</p> <p>XE was first detected in Britain on Jan. 19, the WHO said. And more than 700 cases of XE have been reported in Britain, with more than 600 of them in England, according to British authorities.</p>

There have not been significant numbers of the XE subvariant in countries outside of Britain, Los Angeles County Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer said Tuesday. To date, there have been only three cases of XE reported in the U.S., she said.

The preliminary data available so far suggest XE “is going to be easier to catch,” said University of California, San Francisco infectious diseases expert Dr. Peter Chin-Hong in an interview, although people who are vaccinated and boosted should have a relatively lower risk of suffering hospitalization and death, as is the case with other omicron subvariants.

“But if XE becomes more prominent in this country, it does add a little bit of fire for people to get boosted overall. And it adds a little fire maybe for the oldest people in our population to maybe get their second booster,” Chin-Hong said.

XE likely developed from someone who was co-infected with BA. 2 and the earlier omicron subvariant, BA. 1, Chin-Hong said. BA. 2 is more contagious than BA. 1, and BA. 1 was more contagious than the variant that swept the globe last summer, delta.

So XE is essentially “a child of BA. 1 and BA. 2 that came together and had a recombinant event. So it arose in one person, and it just spread more easily,” Chin-Hong said. XE likely represents about 1% of new cases in Britain, he said.

“It’s coming at a time that’s a little bit concerning,” Chin-Hong said. “And that time is when jurisdictions and countries are decreasing efforts to track variants and person-power to do sequencing (to identify the variants of new cases), potentially, because you have less resources because it’s quote-unquote ‘not an emergency anymore.’”

That means identifying the latest subvariant or variant might take longer to identify than before, Chin-Hong said.

It’s also possible XE could fizzle out, such as the so-called “[deltacron](#)” subvariants — mishmashes of the delta and omicron variants — that gained attention last month but faded from the public view.

The “deltacron” subvariants are known as XD and XF, Chin-Hong said.

At a briefing to UC San Francisco colleagues last week, infectious diseases expert and epidemiologist Dr. George Rutherford said XD had elements of its genetic material from delta and omicron’s BA. 1 subvariant; and XF is mostly BA. 1 but has some elements of delta.

This mishmash of subvariants is not unexpected, Rutherford said, and viruses go through such recombination all the time. As of last week, British authorities were still “sort of ho-hum about it,” Rutherford said, and more data still need to come out to really determine whether it’s more transmissible than BA.2.

Ferrer agreed that more data need to emerge to really know what to expect with XE. “There is still too little data to draw conclusions about growth advantage or other properties of this variant,” Ferrer said.

“But just be aware that there are these recombinant lineages that are starting to show up,” Rutherford said. Scientists say the increasing prolificness of new variants is expected when more people are getting infected with the coronavirus. The more infections there are, the more likely are the chances new strains can develop.

Strains that combine aspects of more than one strain are yet another reason to stay vigilant about COVID-19, said Orange County health officer Dr. Regina Chinsio-Kwong.

	<p>“We have all been humbled by COVID over the last two years,” Chinsio-Kwong said. “COVID can continue to change ... it can decide to escape our immune defenses, even if we’re vaccinated, or it can be more transmissible.</p> <p>“The best thing we can do is continue to keep our guard up and be vigilant,” Chinsio-Kwong said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 AAA on last-minute spring break getaways
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/travel/spring-break-travel-aaa-washington/281-c1bcf70b-430b-4488-8977-1f090ba34ec0
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — As families get ready to hit the road or pack for their flights, here's what AAA Washington said to expect for spring break travel this year.</p> <p>Families traveling on the road are facing high gas prices this year, but Kelly Just with AAA Washington said rarely do people cancel trips because of the prices alone.</p> <p>"Research has shown that prices have to get pretty high, around, in the \$5 mark which we've hit now before people start adjusting their plans. But rarely do they cancel their trips," said Just. "You can cut costs in other ways, with your hotel. You can maybe make your own food instead of going to restaurants."</p> <p>If heading out to a National Park, Just said to keep in mind that going more remote usually means a higher cost because there are fewer places to choose from.</p> <p>Those hoping to put together a last-minute trip may want to reconsider, according to Just.</p> <p>"It's highly unlikely that you will find a flight and if you do find a flight, it's going to be more expensive than you're used to," said Just.</p> <p>And once you have arrived at your destination, hopefully, you already have a rental car reservation waiting.</p> <p>"The same is kind of true for rental vehicles. Rental companies are just still restoring their fleets after COVID 19," said Just. "So you've likely missed the window to book a flight and a rental car alone, let alone at a cheaper price."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Spring weather ‘typical winter pattern’
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/spring-weather-is-typical-winter-pattern/SWSAGOGK6RFGRF3YSYRZZ5DUYA/
GIST	<p>Our weekend of wacky weather continues, jumping into spring with a mixed bag of conditions.</p> <p>Washington State Department of Transportation says traffic is getting through Snoqualmie Pass. But traction tires are still required.</p> <p>And in the lowlands, there was more rain and hail.</p> <p>There were plenty of stray showers all around. But the ever-changing skies show that this wacky weather isn’t done yet.</p> <p>Light snowflakes were the order of the day for drivers along State Route 167 in Algona. You can just about make them out in this DOT video.</p> <p>This comes days after some imagined summer had arrived early.</p>

	<p>“My older one commented that this was the first day of summer she thought,” said Melissa Geng of Bellevue, about her 5-year-old daughter. “And now it feels like it’s back to winter.”</p> <p>“It’s actually more of a typical winter pattern in terms of winter weather for us,” said Carly Kovacik, a National Weather Service meteorologist. “But here we are. And it’s April. And we’re going through it.”</p> <p>Going through it, says Kovacik, because the storms are actually coming from our neighbors to the north.</p> <p>So why was it so warm Thursday?</p> <p>“Well, that was right before the pattern changed,” Kovacik said. “So, we actually had an area of high pressure above us and brought us the warm weather.”</p> <p>But that didn’t last long. By Saturday, so much snow fell in the mountains that an avalanche of accidents led to the closure of Snoqualmie Pass for hours.</p> <p>Even the lowlands got a good helping of a wintry mix all weekend long.</p> <p>“It was nuts, yeah,” said Jason Mattson of Centralia. “Yeah, it was a surprise. But today’s gorgeous. Happy for the change. You just never know in Washington.”</p> <p>That is certainly the truth. But there is a silver lining in all of this precipitation.</p> <p>At least for now, there is no drought on this side of the mountains. Not so in Eastern Washington. They could use some of the precipitation we are getting.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 ‘Seattle Restored’ pop-ups in downtown
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-restored-program-aims-help-fill-vacant-storefronts-downtown
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Expect to see more vacant storefronts filled in downtown Seattle as pop-up small businesses and artists begin to move in.</p> <p>It's all part of a program to help create economic development in the downtown core.</p> <p>"For me, it's just about, my journey spiritually, and my journey in healing."</p> <p>Sierra Jones recently opened a new store in downtown Seattle near 4th Ave and University St called Inside, It's a place she's dreamed of opening for years</p> <p>"We have different candle makers. Again, I love scents and smells, I love walking in a place that smells good," Jones says.</p> <p>It's a store dedicated to wellness and self-care</p> <p>"I have a little “protect your energy kit” which contains, some salts and blue sage."</p> <p>Jones has been given the opportunity through “Seattle Restored”. It’s a program that’s part of the city’s Office of Economic Development where business owners and artists are temporarily given vacant spaces downtown that’ll serve as pop-up shops and art installations.</p> <p>"It is an honor, it was surreal. It was nice to have my dream and my vision validated," Jones said.</p> <p>But before this dream became a reality, there was a tough selection process</p>

	<p>"We received several hundred applications for 30 pop-ups, so you can imagine the type of volume that really goes to show how excited people were for this type of program," said Karissa Braxton with the city's Office of Economic Development.</p> <p>Inside is ready to go but it's also the parts outside of Jone's store that city leaders want to see change.</p> <p>"We want people downtown. We want our dollars recycling. We want to support our biopic business communities," said Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell on the program. "This is what we're going to be doing this whole year to get things back in shape for Seattle."</p> <p>And Jones is confident places like Inside will help the city get there</p> <p>"I'm born and raised in Seattle. I believe we can get back to where we were before," says Jones.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Sound Transit: light rail projects delayed
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/sound-transit-4-light-rail-projects-will-be-delayed-following-strike
GIST	<p>SHORELINE, Wash. - Concrete mixer and dump truck drivers are returning to work after going on strike in December in Seattle.</p> <p>The strike delayed construction projects across the region, including four major light rail projects in the Seattle area.</p> <p>The Lynnwood Link Extension Project was expected to extend light rail into Snohomish County in 2024. But, projects like that have experienced a major slowdown after concrete drivers started striking.</p> <p>"What you are seeing right here is our 185th station and garage," said Ginger Ferguson, construction manager with Sound Transit. "This area here has been under heavy construction for the last couple of years. We had a lot of this built out and ready when the strike started."</p> <p>With the strike ending, Sound Transit says that construction will begin again on the areas of the projects that need concrete to move forward.</p> <p>"Our progress has been greatly slowed down for several months," said Ron Lewis, executive director of Sound Transit's Design, Engineering and Construction Management Group. "That's why Sound Transit is greatly relieved that the Teamsters Local 174 yesterday offered an unconditional resolution to its strike affecting the delivery concrete to projects across King and Snohomish County."</p> <p>Despite the relief, Lewis said the strike has slowed down progress on the four major light rail extensions in King and Snohomish County. He said that includes a 14-mile extension to Mercer Island, Bellevue and Redmond, and the extension from there to downtown Redmond. Lewis said it also includes the Lynnwood Link project to Shoreline, Mountlake Terrace and Lynnwood, and the nearly 8-mile extension to Kent and Federal Way.</p> <p>"The strike that ended in its fifth month is having a meaningful impact on all our projects," said Lewis.</p> <p>Lewis says he doesn't know how this might impact the final completion dates yet, but staff will be assessing the impact across their 'entire portfolio' and working with the board to determine what to do about it.</p> <p>The Teamsters Union Local 174 released a statement: <i>"For months, the companies controlling Seattle's concrete industry have stonewalled negotiations and rejected nine different proposals from Teamsters Local 174 that would support working families. On Friday, the 300+ ready-mix concrete and dump truck drivers and support staff offered an unconditional</i></p>

	<p><i>return to work starting on Monday for the people of Seattle. Meanwhile, negotiations for a new contract will continue."</i></p> <p>Lewis hopes the delays don't become a pattern. "We again call on the parties to work towards a long term solution," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Vaccinations rise after weeks steady drop
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/10/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?name=style-coronavirus&region=hub&block=storyline_live_updates_block_recirc&action=click&pgtype=LegacyCollection#vaccinations-rise-after-several-weeks-of-a-steady-decline
GIST	<p>For most of this year, the rolling average for the number of Covid-19 vaccinations administered each day in the U.S. has been trending downward. But that changed recently.</p> <p>For eight consecutive days ending on Friday, the last day for which data is available, the average number of vaccinations administered more than doubled to 485,505 a day on Friday from 214,405 a day on March 30, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>The bulk of the recent vaccinations were booster doses, data shows.</p> <p>While there is no certain explanation for the noticeable jump in shots, the daily increases came after federal regulators authorized second booster shots of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines late last month for everyone 50 and older who had received their first booster shots at least four months earlier.</p> <p>Those 12 and older with certain immune deficiencies were also authorized to receive a second booster, the Food and Drug Administration said.</p> <p>The decision meant that tens of millions of Americans have become eligible for their fourth vaccine shots just as the country is dealing with a highly contagious Omicron subvariant, known as BA.2, which caused cases to rise in Europe and which is now the dominant version of the virus in new U.S. cases.</p> <p>Although caseloads nationally have been relatively low in recent weeks, BA.2 is contributing to an increase in cases in some places, especially in the Northeast.</p> <p>Epidemiologists say it's likely that older Americans seeking extra shots are driving the vaccination surge.</p> <p>"Data from other countries currently experiencing BA.2 surges suggests that second boosters will make a meaningful impact in protecting vulnerable individuals," said Bertha Hidalgo, an associate professor of epidemiology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.</p> <p>After two years of living with the pandemic, the country's campaign to vaccinate its population seemed to have hit a wall earlier this year, with fewer people showing up for first shots.</p> <p>In at least 17 states, less than 60 percent of the population is fully vaccinated, meaning they have had two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines or had received the Johnson & Johnson single-dose vaccine. States where vaccinations lag include Alabama, Wyoming, Mississippi, Louisiana and Idaho, according to federal data.</p> <p>Dr. Hidalgo said she did not expect to see an increase in vaccinations in states with low inoculation rates because of vaccine hesitancy — which, she added, was prevalent and persistent in many parts of the country.</p> <p>"I do expect that numbers will largely plateau" in those states, she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Fauci: uptick concerning but not surprising
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/10/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?name=styl-coronavirus&region=hub&block=storyline_live_updates_block_recirc&action=click&pgtype=LegacyCollection#fauci-ba2-omicron-covid
GIST	<p>The uptick in new U.S. coronavirus cases in recent days is concerning, Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, said Sunday. But he suggested that the rise was not yet cause for alarm and that officials were monitoring it "very, very carefully."</p> <p>Across the country, there are more than 31,000 new virus cases a day, on average, a 3 percent increase from two weeks ago, according to a New York Times database. But some regions and cities, including New York City and Washington, D.C., are experiencing sharper increases, though their average number of new cases remains far below peaks during the recent winter surge. In New York City, cases have increased nearly 50 percent over the past two weeks and several officials and Broadway stars have recently tested positive.</p> <p>Several lawmakers and Biden administration officials in Washington have recently tested positive, too. On Sunday, Representative Jackie Speier of California announced on Twitter that she had tested positive, and was experiencing mild symptoms. "I'm thankful to be vaccinated and double-boosted," she added.</p> <p>This rise is not surprising, given the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron subvariant known as BA.2 and the easing of many public health measures, such as mask mandates, across the country, Dr. Fauci said on ABC's "This Week."</p> <p>"This is not unexpected — that you're going to see an uptick when you pull back on the mitigation methods," he said.</p> <p>But, he noted, most areas of the country have low community levels of Covid-19, according to calculations performed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that are designed to assess the number of new cases in a community and the strain on its hospitals.</p> <p>Dr. Fauci said he was hopeful that the nation would not see a large surge in hospitalizations or deaths, which lag behind new cases and are still declining nationwide.</p> <p>"If we do start seeing an uptick, particularly of hospitalizations, we may need to revert back to being more careful and having more utilizations of masks indoors," he said.</p> <p>In the meantime, Dr. Fauci encouraged all eligible Americans to get vaccinated and boosted and expressed hope that Congress would soon pass a \$10 billion Covid relief bill.</p> <p>Congress adjourned for a two-week recess last week without voting on the package, which would provide more funding for treatments, testing and vaccines.</p> <p>"We need this Covid funding," Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said on "Fox News Sunday." "And it's really a huge disappointment to us that the Congress has left for two weeks without passing this into law."</p> <p>A small surge of coronavirus infections has swept through the halls of Washington over the last week. Dozens tested positive, including several administration officials and members of Congress, after attending the Gridiron Club and Foundation's annual dinner on April 2.</p> <p>President Biden did not attend the dinner, but his sister, who did, tested positive; Mr. Biden appeared, maskless, at several public events last week, raising concerns about whether he might have contracted the virus.</p> <p>On Sunday, Dr. Fauci defended the procedures that are in place to protect the president.</p>

“He’s fully vaccinated,” Dr. Fauci said. “[He’s doubly boosted](#), and most of the time, people who get anywhere near him need to be tested. So we feel the protocol is a reasonable protocol.”

Dr. Fauci stressed that the seriousness of coronavirus infections should not be discounted and could still result in significant illness and [long Covid](#), even if they don’t lead to hospitalization. But, he said, people need to make their own decisions about the risks they’re willing to take.

“This is not going to be eradicated, and it’s not going to be eliminated,” he said. “And what’s going to happen is that we’re going to see that each individual is going to have to make their calculation of the amount of risk that they want to take in going to indoor dinners and in going to functions.”

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HEADLINE	04/10 Reevaluating Russia military reputation
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/10/rethinking-russia-failures-ukraine-dent-militarys-/
GIST	<p>Russia may have proven itself to be less of a great power and more of a loose cannon.</p> <p>Six weeks into Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine and on the heels of a stunning loss in the battle for Kyiv, the overall competency of Russia’s military is suddenly in doubt. And its perceived spot near the top of the 21st-century global pecking order is being reassessed.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin faces even deeper, more fundamental questions as well, including doubts about whether his country’s hybrid war doctrine and vaunted disinformation campaigns are as devastating as the West feared, and whether the apparent lack of morale among his troops will dramatically limit any Russian effort to project military power beyond its borders in the future.</p> <p>Unable to capture Ukraine’s capital and having failed spectacularly in its mission to psychologically break the Ukrainian people, Moscow has resorted to the apparent murder of civilians and the destruction of cities.</p> <p>Mr. Putin and his deputies also have made thinly veiled references to the nation’s nuclear stockpile, which is the largest on Earth and a key factor in the U.S. and its NATO allies opting against direct intervention.</p> <p>But Russia’s failures in traditional wartime domains, combined with its scorched-earth tactics and nuclear saber-rattling, may have revealed a country that is even more dangerous than previously thought.</p> <p>Western defense and national security specialists are grappling with whether Russian leadership, having already abandoned its goal of capturing Kyiv, could take more drastic action, including the possible use of a tactical nuclear bomb or a strike on NATO territory.</p> <p>Mr. Putin’s apparent disregard for the lives of civilians adds even more urgency to those questions, which are especially prevalent in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. Inside Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, longstanding fears about a Russian attack haven’t melted away simply because of Ukraine’s unexpected success in fending off the invaders.</p> <p>“They’ve got a bear that is out of control and could come lumbering into the backyard any day. And he [Mr. Putin] will be a problem if he comes lumbering in,” said Jim Townsend, former deputy assistant secretary of defense for European and NATO policy during the Obama administration.</p> <p>“I think we were all surprised that they didn’t do as well as everyone initially thought they would,” Mr. Townsend said of Russia’s troops. “But you don’t just assume then that they’re 4 feet tall. ... I think you get more concerned. You get concerned because Putin is very unpredictable and very aggressive. He’s now been confronted with some disappointment that makes him even more aggressive. He might feel cornered. He might feel surrounded. He might feel humiliated. We don’t know. He might lash out. And if you’re one of the Baltics, you don’t know what he’ll do.”</p>

Indeed, there is little doubt that Russia's pullback from northern Ukraine has been a deep humiliation for Mr. Putin and Russia's military leadership. In the early days of the invasion, Western analysts generally agreed that Kyiv was likely to fall within days.

Instead, Russian forces never seemed particularly close to capturing the city. Russian tanks became sitting ducks for anti-tank weapons because they weren't properly camouflaged, sparking mockery across social media. Entire Russian convoys sat on open roads for days because they ran out of fuel. Russian radar-jamming technology utterly failed to detect and disable Ukrainian drones, which wreaked havoc on enemy ground vehicles.

Reevaluating Russia's power

Such mistakes have been surprising to Western military analysts. For the past five years, Pentagon strategy documents and U.S. national security assessments have routinely placed America, China and Russia together in discussions about the "great power competition" that is expected to define the next century.

Even before its invasion of Ukraine, Russia's inclusion among the great powers of the world rested much more on its military might than the strength of its economy. That differentiates the country from China, which has created its own powerful military machine but also has built itself into an economic powerhouse with deep investment roots around the world.

Russia's economic power, meanwhile, keeps shrinking in the face of unprecedented sanctions, the closure of major Western businesses, and a growing European move to end imports of Russian gas and oil, which are the lifeblood of Mr. Putin's economy.

But on paper, Russia's military remains one of the world's mightiest. The online clearinghouse GlobalFirepower.com lists Russia as No. 2 behind the U.S. in terms of overall military might.

Despite major losses in its Ukrainian campaign, Russia still has a massive personnel edge over virtually any other country in the world other than the U.S. or China. It still has a major arsenal of tanks, planes and other weapons.

By those traditional metrics, Moscow remains one of the world's most formidable forces.

The combination of that military might with 21st-century disinformation tools was expected to give Russia an edge.

Analysts feared that the type of social media warfare and narrative-molding that Moscow used in its 2016 U.S. election interference and in other campaigns would be brought to bear in Ukraine to undermine the government in Kyiv and create a relatively friendly environment for Russian troops. That disinformation warfare was expected to be combined with cyberattacks on Ukrainian agencies and businesses.

Those expectations haven't materialized. Analysts initially attributed much of Russia's failure to military leaders' inability to tell Mr. Putin the truth out of fear they'd be punished.

But now there's a growing school of thought challenging the underlying assumption of Moscow's war fighting doctrine, which could reshape broader attitudes about Russia.

"At this stage, we might consider an alternative explanation: that Russia's failures reflect a series of long-standing erroneous assumptions about modern warfare that are held by wide segments of the military," Sam Cranny-Evans and Sidharth Kaushal, researchers with the British think tank Royal United Services Institute, wrote in a recent analysis. "If this is the case, senior members of the uniformed military may not have had to hold their tongues and subscribe to a war plan they did not

	<p>believe in; rather, the war plan might be a reflection of what Russian officers have been writing and saying about modern war for years.”</p> <p>“Non-military tools and military ones need not complement each other, and may actually have contradictory effects. For example, efforts to cultivate friendly or apathetic elements in a foreign society may be entirely undone by an assault that has a unifying effort on an opposing society,” Mr. Cranny-Evans and Mr. Kaushal wrote. “In this context, previously sympathetic or neutral elements may alter their loyalties or at least avoid acting in support of an invading force. Rather than complementing each other in an additive fashion, then, subversion and direct assault may be contradictory.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Protesters shutdown highway in D.C.
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/8/protesters-shut-down-interstate-highway-dc-demand/
GIST	<p>Climate change activists on Friday shut down traffic on Interstate 395 for the second time this week, demanding that President Biden declare a climate emergency.</p> <p>Nearly a dozen protesters from the far-left group Declare Emergency brought traffic to a standstill on one of Washington’s busiest thoroughfares. Activists who were waving banners and chanting managed to shut down traffic on the northbound lane of the highway directly before the exit for the Third Street Tunnel that leads to the city center near the Capitol.</p> <p>“As the president of the most powerful and influential nation on earth, Biden has a responsibility to tell us and the world the truth and take real action,” the group said in a statement. “He now has a choice: he can either leave a legacy of honor, duty, honesty, and action so that future generations might say that he fought for their lives and families, or he can continue avoiding his responsibilities to the country and the planet.”</p> <p>The D.C. Metropolitan Police Department eventually cleared the disruption by arresting the protesters. It marks the second time this week that Declare Emergency has brought traffic to a standstill.</p> <p>On Wednesday, activists from the group blocked all northbound lanes on I-395 in a similar attempt to pressure Mr. Biden.</p> <p>The protest comes as the White House has urged the oil industry to ramp up production in response to record-high gasoline prices.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Russia shakes up military leadership
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/10/russia-installs-new-commander-ukraine-calls-discha/
GIST	<p>Russia shook up its military leadership over the weekend and began recalling discharged veterans ahead of a major offensive in eastern Ukraine, as Washington grappled with how far to go in aiding Ukrainian troops while still avoiding a direct confrontation with Moscow.</p> <p>Having effectively lost the battle for Kyiv amid a host of missteps, the Kremlin installed Gen. Aleksandr V. Dvornikov as the new head of its force in Ukraine.</p> <p>The 60-year-old general previously commanded troops in Syria, earning the nickname “the butcher of Syria” because of the ruthless tactics he employed as part of Moscow’s effort to prop up dictator Bashar Assad’s regime.</p> <p>Gen. Dvornikov’s appointment indicates growing frustration inside the Kremlin with Russia’s battlefield failures in Ukraine. But it also suggests that Russia is doubling down on a brutal, indiscriminate approach to war and is poised to kill many more Ukrainian civilians.</p> <p>U.S. officials say the installation of Gen. Dvornikov highlights Russia’s poor showing in the military campaign so far while also sending a chilling message about where the conflict is headed.</p>

“First, no appointment of any general can erase the fact that Russia has already faced strategic failure in Ukraine,” White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told CNN’s “State of the Union” on Sunday. “They thought they were going to be able to conquer the capital city and take other major cities with little resistance, that they’d in fact be welcomed with open arms.”

“This particular general has a resume that includes brutality against civilians in other theaters, in Syria, and we can expect more of the same in this theater,” Mr. Sullivan said. “This general will just be another author of crimes and brutality against Ukrainian civilians and the United States ... is determined to do all we can to support the Ukrainians as they resist him, as they resist the forces he commands.”

There are other clear indications that Russia is encountering serious problems in its campaign in Ukraine. With casualties mounting, Moscow has resorted to calling back troops who have been discharged from duty since 2012, the British Ministry of Defense said Sunday in its daily assessment of the war in Ukraine.

British officials also said Russia is trying to recruit fresh troops from Transnistria, an unrecognized breakaway territory in Moldova.

Against that backdrop, the Biden administration is facing growing pressure at home and abroad to dramatically ramp up shipments of offensive weapons to Ukraine, such as tanks and fighter jets.

Republicans say the U.S. should try to ensure an unmitigated defeat for Moscow, rather than simply improve Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s hand at the negotiating table.

“We want the Ukrainians to win, to win, to defeat the Russians, for the Russians to withdraw from the country. And that ought to be our goal,” Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell told “Fox News Sunday,” going on to criticize the administration’s approach to the eventual end of the war.

“They still don’t understand the goal,” the Kentucky Republican said. “The goal is for Ukraine to win.”

Administration officials have made abundantly clear they want to see Russia’s invasion of Ukraine end in failure. But they also seem resigned to the fact that Mr. Zelenskyy may have to make concessions to Moscow in order to permanently end the conflict.

Such concessions could include promises that Ukraine won’t join NATO or the permanent ceding of control of the Crimean Peninsula to Moscow.

Mr. Sullivan made clear that U.S. efforts to bolster the Ukrainian military are aimed at giving the country more leverage over the Kremlin.

“Russia retreated” from Kyiv, Mr. Sullivan said. “And they did so because they faced brave and stiff Ukrainian resistance. But that resistance was armed with American weapons and Western weapons that the United States of America delivered. And we are proud of that. We will continue to do that. And we will continue to take every step we possibly can to help the Ukrainians succeed on the battlefield and to improve their position at the negotiating table.”

As he has done throughout the six-week conflict, Mr. Zelenskyy framed the Russian invasion in much broader terms. He appealed to the U.S. and its NATO allies to do more, arguing that the “entire European project is a target” of Moscow’s aggression.

“That is why it is not just the moral duty of all democracies, all the forces of Europe, to support Ukraine’s desire for peace,” Mr. Zelenskyy said in remarks early Sunday. “This is, in fact, a strategy of defense for every civilized state.”

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SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/11/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-47-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vladimir Putin has appointed a new general to direct the war in Ukraine as his military shifts plans after a failure to take Kyiv. Alexander Dvornikov gained prominence while leading the Russian group of forces in Syria. The general is likely to usher in a fresh round of “crimes and brutality” against civilians, the US said. • Karl Nehammer, the Austrian chancellor, plans to speak about alleged war crimes in Bucha during his visit to meet Putin on Monday. Nehammer will be the first European leader to meet the Russian president since Russia invaded Ukraine in February. • Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy hit back against Russian propaganda on war crimes, the invasion of Crimea and the downing of MH17, saying: “They say about the murders in Bucha that it is not them, but allegedly us, although it is obvious to everyone that people were killed while the Russian army controlled the city ... The Russian militaries have already lied to the fact that even after more than six weeks of war, they claim that they did not hit any of the civilian objects. Do you know why this is so? Because it’s cowardice.” • Zelenskyy welcomed talks with the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, on war crimes and sanctions against Russia, adding: “I am glad to note that the German position has recently changed in favour of Ukraine.” Germany has been under pressure to wean itself off Russian energy and had also been criticised earlier in the war for its failure to supply weapons to Ukraine, a policy that has since been reversed. • Russian forces pounded eastern Ukraine with heavy shelling over the weekend, killing 10 civilians, including a child and wounding 11 others around Kharkiv. The airport in the east-central Ukrainian city of Dnipro was also destroyed. • Joe Biden is set to hold a virtual meeting with India’s prime minister, Narendra Modi, on Monday, with the US president expected to press India not to increase its imports of Russian crude. Biden has previously accused India of being the only “somewhat shaky” country in the Quad group of nations – which also includes Japan and Australia – regarding Ukraine. It has not so far imposed any sanctions on Russia. • Nearly 3,000 people were evacuated on Sunday through humanitarian corridors, including 213 from Mariupol, said Ukraine’s deputy prime minister, Iryna Vereshchuk. • Pope Francis has called for an Easter ceasefire to allow for a push for peace in Ukraine, calling the war a “folly” that was leading to “heinous massacres” and “atrocious cruelty” against defenceless people. • 1,222 bodies have been found in the region around the capital, Kyiv, so far, Ukraine’s prosecutor general, Iryna Venediktova, said. Ukrainian authorities are investigating 5,600 cases of alleged war crimes committed by Russian troops since the invasion began. • Ukraine’s economy is expected to collapse by 45.1% this year, far worse than predicted, the World Bank reported in a dire forecast as the conflict drags on. • The United Nations refugee agency calculates that more than 4.5 million Ukrainian refugees have fled Ukraine since the invasion began. • Russian armed forces are seeking to strengthen troop numbers with personnel discharged from military service a decade ago, as losses mount. • The White House has renewed its condemnation of the Russian targeting of Ukrainian civilians as war crimes, citing recent events including Friday’s missile strike on a railway station as “cruel and criminal and evil”. The death toll from Kramatorsk train station attack has risen to 57, Ukraine said. • More than 3,500 pro-Ukrainian demonstrators took to the streets of Germany in response to a motorcade of about 600 pro-Russian protesters in 400 cars flying Russian flags.
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HEADLINE	04/11 NATO conducts wargames in Lithuania
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/11/nato-achilles-heel-alliance-conducts-war-games-nervous-lithuania
GIST	About 30km west of the Belarusian border, the enemy’s tanks were rolling through the pine forests of Lithuania at speed until a makeshift obstacle made of barbed wire blocked their path. Soldiers carrying bolt cutters jumped out of the armoured vehicle at the front to clear the road.

Then, a deafening bang. In its rush to victory, the advancing party had neglected to check the sandy terrain underneath the roadblock for mines. Luckily, for them, this was merely a dress rehearsal for a showdown between Russia and the North Atlantic alliance.

No live explosives were used in Nato's "Rising Griffin" manoeuvre at the Pabradė military base in western Lithuania. Instead, referees politely informed the tank commanders that their vehicles would have been ripped to shreds. The Russian enemy was being impersonated by American and Norwegian troops.

The western defenders may have notched up a tactical victory against an eastern aggressor on this sunny April morning, yet Nato's security architecture has never looked more fragile than in the spring of 2022, especially when viewed from Lithuania, a country long considered the alliance's achilles heel.

An independent republic since 1990, the southernmost of the three Baltic states borders both Russia-allied Belarus on its eastern side and the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad on its western flank. On Russian television, pundits have openly urged the Kremlin to escalate the war in Ukraine by enforcing a military corridor along the "Suwalki gap" – Lithuania's short border with Poland – thus cutting off the Baltics from other Nato-allied lands.

"Until last November, we had the Russian army quite far away from Nato's borders," said Gabrielius Landsbergis, Lithuania's foreign minister. "Now the military activity is very close. To add to that, Lithuania lies between the territory of Belarus and the territory of Kaliningrad. Which puts us in a strategic situation that is, let's say, interesting."

Since 2016, after Russia's annexation of Crimea, "enhanced forward presence" battlegroups have been stationed in four member states on Nato's eastern flank: Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

The war in Ukraine has led the alliance to further bolster its presence in the region, with multinational battalions to be dispatched to Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia. The military presence in Lithuania has been increased from approximately 1,200 to roughly 1,600 soldiers and equipped with new hardware, such as the German army's light and mobile Ozelot anti-aircraft system, which can be used to protect airports from aerial assaults.

But the function of these military units remains that of a "tripwire": a reminder to hardliners in the Kremlin that invading what they may see as renegade breakaway nations of a former Russian empire would automatically trigger a military conflict with other western European states. But in their current state, there is little doubt the enhanced forward presence units would sooner or later be overrun.

The scenario being rehearsed in the Rising Griffin exercise was a David v Goliath one, with the attacking force taking the role of the giant. The priority of Nato's troops in the manoeuvre, said one officer, was to "delay the enemy", not to hold the line.

As Nato members prepare to meet in Madrid in June, Lithuania, along with its Baltic neighbour Estonia, is calling on Nato to urgently adjust its posture in the region from deterrence to what it calls "forward defence".

"What we're seeing in Russia and Belarus is now a dangerous country with the intention to attack other sovereign states," Landsbergis told the Guardian. "It's a double-edged sword: on the one hand Russia has proven in Ukraine that it is a declining regional power. On the other hand, it can still do a lot of damage on its way down, as it seems to have no regard for its own losses. We have to defend the Baltic states, especially those that are geographically interesting to Russia."

In keeping with the "founding act", a political agreement signed by Nato and Russia in 1997, there are restrictions on how many western allied troops are allowed to be deployed to the Baltics, and how close they can be stationed to the border.

	<p>The enhanced forward presence in Lithuania, which is made up of seven European nations and led by Germany's Bundeswehr, has to be rotated every six months at considerable cost and effort, with hundreds of vehicles having to be transported by road, rail or air before each changeover.</p> <p>While countries such as Germany and the UK remain committed to the founding act, Lithuania and other states in the region say the document is no longer viable as a treaty.</p> <p>"We consider it null and void after what Russia has done," Landsbergis said. "The new reality we have to accept is that the treaties that built the old security environment with Russia are no more. We have to look at this with new eyes. There has to be a permanent military presence with everything needed to defend the skies, defend the seas and defend the land of the Baltic states."</p> <p>Estonia's prime minister last week called for the three Baltic states to be handed "war-fighting capabilities", with divisions of up to 25,000 soldiers per country.</p> <p>"The question we have to ask ourselves is: what will be the new global security architecture of the world after this war?" said Landsbergis. "At the moment, we are merely reacting to what is happening in Ukraine. But that has to change. We have to start thinking in strategic terms."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 US: Russia war chief more brutality
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/10/new-russian-war-chief-will-bring-more-brutality-in-ukraine-us-warns
GIST	<p>The newly appointed general in command of Russia's military campaign in Ukraine is likely to usher in a fresh round of "crimes and brutality" against civilians, the US has said.</p> <p>Jake Sullivan, the national security adviser in Washington, said the appointment of Alexander Dvornikov as theatre commander of Russian forces in Ukraine could not disguise the strategic failure of Vladimir Putin's war so far. "Ukraine will never be subjugated to Russia; it doesn't matter which general President Putin tries to appoint," he told CNN.</p> <p>Dvornikov's appointment follows the withdrawal of Russian forces from around the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv. Dvornikov, 60, came to prominence at the head of Russian troops in Syria in 2015-16, when there was particularly brutal bombardment of rebel-held areas, including civilian populations, in Aleppo.</p> <p>Sullivan said Dvornikov's promotion would lead to more atrocities. "This particular general has a résumé that includes brutality against civilians in other theatres – in Syria – and we can expect more of the same" in Ukraine, he said.</p> <p>"This general will just be another author of crimes and brutality against Ukrainian civilians, and the United States is determined to do all that we can to support the Ukrainians as they resist him and the forces that he commands."</p> <p>Dvornikov's ascent, disclosed by US officials on Sunday, signals an effort by Moscow to impose military order on a campaign that has had serious setbacks. In the face of fierce Ukrainian resistance supported by US, UK and European armaments, Russia appears to be regrouping for a potentially long battle for Donbas, in the east of the country.</p> <p>The Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, told NBC News: "Ukraine won the battle for Kyiv. Now another battle is coming – the battle for Donbas."</p> <p>Asked whether the Ukrainian military was capable of responding to an even more ferocious onslaught from the Russians under Dvornikov, Kuleba said history would demonstrate who would prevail.</p>

“Whatever Russia is planning to do, we have our strategy based on the confidence that we will win this war and we will liberate our territories.”

In what seemed to be further evidence of Russia’s intention to attack Donbas, satellite images showed a 7 mile-long Russian convoy moving south in the Kharkiv region. It included armoured vehicles, trucks with artillery and support equipment.

After failing to capture Kyiv, the Kremlin has rebranded its invasion. It now says its objective is to restore the administrative borders of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, which are partly controlled by pro-Russia separatists. Moscow wants to seize additional Ukrainian-controlled territory and cut off Kyiv’s defending army.

In an update on Sunday, Ukraine’s general staff said the “enemy” was trying to break through near the city of Izyum, south of Kharkiv. It claimed Ukrainian forces had wiped out another “large column of enemy equipment and manpower” heading towards Izyum during an overnight operation.

They had also cleared the village of Vilkhivka, immediately east of Kharkiv. Ukrainian soldiers discovered the corpses of Russian soldiers left behind in a pit, said Oleg Synegubov, a regional military administration head. “This is an example of how these scoundrels act even with their own,” he declared.

The northern column is trying to link up with Russian forces advancing from Mariupol to the south. A number of Ukrainian soldiers from the Azov battalion still control a few central areas, more than a month into a Russian siege in which thousands of civilians have been killed.

The regiment released a video that appeared to show a Russian armoured vehicle next to a beach being blown up. The occupants had been sent “to hell”, it said.

Ukraine’s armed forces claim 19,300 Russian soldiers have been eliminated since the invasion, and 1,911 armoured vehicles destroyed. The Kremlin says the figure is lower, but Putin’s spokesperson Dmitry Peskov has acknowledged that there have been terrible casualties.

Russian rockets completely destroyed the airport and nearby buildings in the city of Dnipro. In occupied Kherson, troops broke up another large peaceful rally in the city’s main square. There was a much smaller pro-Russia rally in Nova Kakhovka, in the southern Kherson region.

Ukrainian officials described the meeting as fake, and part of an attempt by Russia to establish a so-called Kherson people’s republic. Yuri Sobolevskyi, the first deputy head of the Kherson regional council, described the rally as a “gathering of clowns”.

“When thousands turn out of their own free will for a pro-Ukrainian rally, it’s a call of the heart,” Sobolevskyi said. “When a few dozen people carrying the flag of a nation of murderers try to make any kind of picture of a rally, these are purely theatrical actions,” he said, adding that those who attended were not Ukrainian citizens.

As evidence of Russian atrocities including the torture of civilians continues to emerge, the White House is coming under pressure to declare the war an act of genocide. So far the Biden administration has been wary of adopting the term.

Sullivan said Russia’s record of “systematically targeting civilians, the grisly murder of innocent people ... absolutely constitutes war crimes”. But he stopped short of embracing the international legal concept of genocide.

He told ABC News that a specialist unit within the state department was equipped to make that assessment. “That is a determination that we work through systematically,” he said.

	Under the UN definition, first codified in 1948, genocide constitutes killing and otherwise inflicting destruction “in whole or in part” on “a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”.
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HEADLINE	04/10 Russia savage occupation of Bucha
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/10/bucha-tells-of-a-dark-and-savage-occupation-deaths-russian-forces
GIST	<p>Natasha Alexandrova was at home when three Russian soldiers banged on her front gate. It was 4 March. Vladimir Putin’s army had captured the city of Bucha, 18.5 miles (30km) north-west of Kyiv, after ferocious fighting. One unit parked at the bottom of Alexandrova’s street, Ivan Franko, next to a pine forest and a train track.</p> <p>The soldiers went from house to house. Alexandrova lived at No 10, together with her 26-year-old nephew, Volodymyr Cherednichenko, and his mother, Nadezhda. “They wanted to know who was living there. They demanded to see our documents and our mobile phones,” she said. “They didn’t beat us. But they had guns.”</p> <p>Alexandrova hid her phone and gave away a spare. Her nephew handed over his real mobile. It contained photos he had taken of a Russian military column, which Ukrainian forces had wiped out the previous week. The ambush took place in Bucha’s railway street. He had sent the images to a friend. “You are coming with us,” the soldiers told him.</p> <p>They escorted her nephew, dressed in a T-shirt and slippers, to No 6, a yellow-painted cottage.</p> <p>Alexandrova said she peered over the picket fence, half up a tree, and eavesdropped on the conversation. “He was crying and sobbing. They’d done something bad to his hand. He was cradling it. He told them repeatedly: ‘I don’t know any fascists.’”</p> <p>Later the soldiers shoved Cherednichenko into their armoured personnel carrier, which was parked in the property’s apple orchard. His mother brought him a warm coat and shoes. “They told us they were taking him into town for further interrogation and would bring him back after three days,” Alexandrova said. “Nadezhda begged them. She pleaded: ‘Return my son to me.’”</p> <p>For three weeks there was no news. Alexandrova talked to one of the Russians, who told her her nephew had been taken to a “non-active zone” in Belarus. “The soldier was 18. I asked him why he had come to Ukraine? He replied: ‘Money.’ Another said he was missing home, hadn’t eaten <i>pelmeni</i> [dumplings] for two weeks, and had been given rations for three days.”</p> <p>Cherednichenko’s mother continued to believe he was alive.</p> <p>On 29 March, Russian forces withdrew from the Kyiv region, in a staggering setback for Moscow’s plan to conquer Ukraine. It seemed Putin had reckoned on a quick victory that would remove President Volodymyr Zelenskiy and his pro-western government. Instead, his forces got bogged down and sustained massive casualties.</p> <p>Given an order to retreat, the troops rolled chaotically out of Ivan Franko Street and headed north, back towards the Belarusian border. They left behind smashed-up cars adorned with the letter V, a military symbol, some of them flattened by tanks after drunken joyrides. And a lot of bodies. One was found in a dank garden cellar in the neighbouring street, at the bottom of a brick staircase. It was a young man: Cherednichenko.</p> <p>“They made him kneel and shot him in the side of the head, through the ear,” Alexandrova said. “He was wearing the same coat his mother gave him.” In the cellar on Sunday was the bloodstained mattress her nephew had lain on in his final hours, captive and terrified. His was a cold, pitiless killing. There was a pink cuddly toy and the smell of death.</p>

Across Bucha, and the once pleasant suburbs of Hostomel and Irpin, similar crimes were committed during Russia's savage and dark occupation. Residents say the soldiers confiscated mobile phones, demanded car keys and took people away. Some were shot in basements, hands bound. Others were killed inside their homes, or as they drove or cycled along the road.

About a dozen people were murdered on Ivan Franko Street. They included brothers Viktor, 64, and Yuri, 62, who were left lying in a ditch next to the railway line. Sergei Gavrilyuk, a security guard, his brother-in-law Roman and an unknown person were also among the dead. "We couldn't identify him. Half his face was blown off," Alexandrova said of the third victim.

She buried her nephew in her back garden. The grave was small. Spring daffodils grew nearby. Last week, investigators dug up the body, to the barking of Alexandrova's dogs. The family was able to hold a funeral service with Russian prayers. Other relatives were less fortunate. A pile of six charred bodies were found at the beginning of Ivan Franko. A older man lay in nearby Rydzanych Street for several weeks.

Sitting in the kitchen of her neighbour at No 5A, Alexandrova talked about the horrors she had witnessed. After the Ukrainians launched an attack, a Russian soldier accused her of passing on information to the enemy, and threatened her with a grenade. She fetched water from a well with a bucket in one hand and a white flag in the other.

Cherednichenko's father fought with the Ukrainian army in 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and started a conflict in Donbas, she said. He died last year. "Volodymyr wanted to be like his dad, to defend his country. We told him it was dangerous and to think of his mother. He was an electrician, and never a soldier," she said.

Over the weekend, Ukrainian rescuers sifted through the ruined street for mines and further human remains. The house where the Gavrilyuks had once lived was now a phantasmagoric mess. A shell had destroyed a Russian armoured vehicle and flung a sleeping bag and a pair of trousers into a tree. There were unexploded mortars, an empty whisky bottle and a white DAF lorry cab, which had been used by the Russians as a bench and checkpoint.

The soldiers had looted everything: underwear, socks, gold, cash, laptops and drinks cabinets, residents said. The invaders were taken aback by the level of prosperity in Ukraine, the family added. The soldiers began stealing as soon as they arrived in Bucha, a popular weekend destination for Kyiv's affluent classes. "The first stolen vehicle I saw with a V on it was a Tesla," Alexandrova said. "They would steal cars and sleep in them."

Over in Railway Street, emergency workers were towing away mangled infantry vehicles one by one. A blue and white striped shirt, used by airborne troops, had been hung on a gun turret, as if awaiting its owner's return. The Russian vehicles – about 30 of them – pointed mazelike in different directions. It signified a panicked retreat.

This scene of destruction cost Cherednichenko his life. Several locals wandered around on Sunday taking photos. One, Viktor, said he had talked to the Russians during the first day of their occupation of Bucha. "They told me they had orders to take Kyiv and to capture Zelenskiy," he said, adding that two of them had told him they came from the Siberian republic of Buryatia, 4,350 miles away.

Viktor put a few souvenirs from the battle into a bucket: a box used for machine gun ammunition and a chunk of tread. "They are going to the Bucha museum. It's so our children won't forget," he said. Did he feel any sympathy for the Russian soldiers, some of whom perished? "No. They lived in our houses, put snipers on our streets, invaded our country. If we only had a catapult, we would still fight them."

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SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/10/macron-on-28-to-le-pens-23-in-first-round-projected-french-election-results
GIST	<p>France faces a brutal two-week campaign over the country's future, as the centrist incumbent, Emmanuel Macron, faces the far-right Marine Le Pen for the presidency, positioning himself as a pro-European "progressive" against what he calls her anti-Muslim, nationalist programme and "complacency" about Vladimir Putin.</p> <p>Macron topped Sunday's first round of the French presidential election with 27.6% of the vote, ahead of Le Pen's 23.4%, according to initial projected results by Ipsos for France Télévisions.</p> <p>He scored higher than his result in the first round five years ago, and clearly gained support in the final hours of the campaign after his harsh warnings to voters to hold back the far right and protect France's place on the international diplomatic stage amid the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>But Le Pen's score was also higher than five years ago. She had steadily gained support after campaigning hard on the cost of living crisis and inflation, which had become voters' biggest concern.</p> <p>All major candidates, except for the far-right TV pundit Éric Zemmour, immediately called for French people to vote tactically to keep out Le Pen in the second round.</p> <p>Macron told reporters: "When the far-right, in all its forms, represents that much in France, you can't consider things are going well, so you must go out and convince people with a lot of humility, and respect for those who weren't on our side in this first round."</p> <p>He told supporters: "Don't be mistaken, nothing is decided, and the debate we'll have in the next two weeks will be decisive for our country and for Europe".</p> <p>In her own triumphant speech, Le Pen sought to capitalise on anti-Macron feeling after the gilets jaunes (yellow vests) anti-government protests and styled him as divisive and polarising. She said the final round would be "a fundamental choice between two opposing visions of society", which she saw as Macron's "division and disorder" or her promise for "social justice" to protect "society and civilisation". She called on "all those who did not vote for Macron" to join her.</p> <p>The hard-left Mélenchon came in third, with a higher-than-forecast 22% of the vote, cementing his leading position on the left after campaigning on the cost of living and transforming the presidential system.</p> <p>As the contest began on Sunday night for both Macron and Le Pen to vacuum up support from the smaller candidates, the choice of Mélenchon's voters is now key. Mélenchon immediately gave a speech in Paris shouting three times: "Do not give a single vote to Marine Le Pen!" to huge cheers.</p> <p>The majority of his leftwing supporters five years ago opted to vote for Macron in the second round simply to keep out Le Pen. But polls this time have suggested that a number of them may be tempted to vote Le Pen in protest against Macron.</p> <p>Zemmour – who holds convictions for incitement to racial hatred and ran as an outsider on an inflammatory, anti-immigration platform – came fourth with 7.1% of the vote – lower than he had hoped. He immediately called for his voters to back Le Pen.</p> <p>The biggest shock of the night was the very low score of Valérie Pécresse, the candidate for Nicolas Sarkozy's traditional rightwing party Les Républicains. She was projected to take less than 5% – a poor showing that is likely to lead to the implosion of her party in favour of its hardliners. This could leave France in a unique position in Europe of not having a traditional mainstream right.</p> <p>In a speech to supporters, Pécresse said: "[Le Pen's] historical proximity with Vladimir Putin discredits her from defending the interests of our country in these tragic times. Her election would mean that France</p>

would become irrelevant on the European and international scenes. Therefore, and despite my strong disagreement with Macron ... I will vote for him in order to stop Marine Le Pen.”

The decline of the traditional parties of government was confirmed by the Socialist party’s candidate and mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, who took only 2% of the vote. The Greens’ Yannick Jadot scored 4.4% despite the environment being among French voters’ top concerns.

The second round on 24 April will now be a replay of Macron and Le Pen’s last bruising election encounter in 2017. But the stakes are much higher than when Macron easily beat Le Pen with 66% of the vote, which was seen as a victory against populist politics after Donald Trump’s election to the US White House and Britain’s vote to leave the EU.

Macron conceded on the campaign trail he had not managed to calm voters’ concerns about immigration or hold back the “fears” that led people to vote for extremes. Polls over the last week have shown Le Pen as high as 49% for the potential runoff. For the first time, the figures are in the margin of error and give Le Pen the mathematical chance of winning.

For the first time, Le Pen is able to benefit from a reservoir of transferable votes in the second round. About 80% of the votes for Zemmour are now expected to transfer to Le Pen.

Turnout was lower than five years ago, but higher than the record low in 2002 – with abstention forecast at about 26%.

Macron is now seeking to be the first French president to win a second term in 20 years despite a mood of pessimism and disillusionment with politics in France. He entered the race late and said repeatedly he did not have the ability to campaign fully because he was occupied on diplomacy over the war in Ukraine and phonecalls to Putin and the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

Macron’s election platform includes gradually raising the retirement age to 65, which is unpopular and controversial, as well as centralising the benefits system and making unemployed people on certain forms of benefits undertake 15 to 20 hours of activity a week.

He has defended his in office record saying unemployment was at its lowest in 15 years, and promising he could bring full employment. He argued he was the European leader who had done the most to lessen the impact of inflation on households, but on campaign walkabouts he was greeted with angry shouts from people complaining they could not make ends meet.

Le Pen’s radical, far-right anti-immigration platform would involve banning the Muslim headscarf from all public places, including the street. But by focusing on families’ difficulties in making ends meet she managed to neutralise historical fears about her party. This month she became France’s second favourite political personality, behind the former prime minister Édouard Philippe.

Le Pen’s campaign material, which was printed before the war in Ukraine, still featured a picture of her smiling with Putin who she met in 2017. But her swift condemnation of the invasion succeeded in drawing voters’ attention away from her previous pro-Russia stances.

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HEADLINE	04/10 Ukraine, Russia readies biggest battles
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-russia-send-reinforcements-for-pitched-battles-in-conflicts-next-phase-11649588496?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>Ukraine and Russia poured reinforcements into eastern Ukraine this weekend, preparing for what are likely to become the war’s biggest battles as refugees continued to flee the looming Russian assault.</p> <p>Russia’s main objective now is to seize the parts of the eastern Donbas region not yet controlled by Moscow. Unlike the first phase of the six-week-old conflict, that shift is forcing Ukraine into fighting</p>

conventional battles involving tanks, artillery and aircraft on flat, often barren terrain that allows Russia to leverage its superiority in military equipment.

Fresh Russian tank and artillery units, as well as forces withdrawn from areas around Kyiv, began arriving in recent days to staging grounds for the offensive north of the Ukrainian city of Izyum, according to footage shown on Russian military television. Ukraine, too, started moving toward Donbas combat units from areas of northern Ukraine that it recovered after Russian troops retreated.

Skirmishes along the contact line in Donbas and nearby regions continue daily, with Russian forces trying to push south of Izyum. The timing of a major campaign, Western and Ukrainian officials said, is up to Moscow, which may press the offensive imminently with available forces, or wait a few weeks to reconstitute units that suffered losses in northern Ukraine.

Ukrainian officials said Moscow's aims likely go far beyond seizing the Donbas region, and that Mr. Putin seeks to destroy the best Ukrainian units in the battle of Donbas to then try again to seize the rest of the country, including Kyiv.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for urgent assistance ahead of [this new round of the conflict](#), warning that Moscow hasn't given up on its aspirations to subjugate Ukraine. "Russia can still afford to live in illusions, gathering new armor and new troops on our soil. And that means that we need even more sanctions, and even more weapons for our state," he said in a late Saturday video address.

Attempting to disrupt the Ukrainian redeployment, Russia has said that its forces carried out airstrikes on Ukrainian railway hubs. Some 57 people died in Friday's Russian missile attack on the railway station in the Donbas city of Kramatorsk while it was packed with civilians trying to board evacuation trains toward the relative safety of western Ukraine, according to Ukrainian authorities. Moscow denied it carried out that particular strike.

Authorities over the weekend urged all civilians in Ukrainian-controlled parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions—which comprise Donbas—and two districts of the Kharkiv region to use all available means to leave immediately. They organized additional trains and buses.

Russia launched several missile strikes on the Dnipropetrovsk region just west of Donbas on Sunday, destroying the airport terminal and another infrastructure facility in the city of Dnipro and an industrial facility in the city of Pavlohrad, the regional administration said. Six rescue workers were injured in Dnipro as a Russian missile hit one of the sites for a second time later in the day, it said. Ukrainian forces overnight destroyed a Russian column that was moving toward Izyum, according to the governor of Kharkiv. The claim couldn't be independently verified.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it targeted Dnipro with Kalibr missiles from a Black Sea fleet frigate and that its missiles also struck the southern Ukrainian region of Mykolayiv and a military airfield near Kharkiv, where it said it destroyed an S-300 anti-aircraft missile system. Those claims couldn't be confirmed independently. Dnipro, one of Ukraine's biggest cities, is the logistical hub for Ukrainian military operations in Donbas.

Russia's initial attempt to seize Kyiv and other cities in northern Ukraine collapsed in late March, in part because nimble Ukrainian units attacked Russian tanks and armored vehicles using guerrilla tactics, striking at Russia's long supply lines that ran through woods and villages whose residents relayed intelligence to Ukrainian forces. Light, portable missiles supplied by the U.S. and its European allies, such as the Javelin and the NLAW, played a big role in that success, as did Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 armed drones.

Many Russian battalion tactical groups that withdrew from northern Ukraine were battered so badly that they won't be able to redeploy to the Donbas front anytime soon, Ukrainian and Western officials said. "We've seen indications on some units that are, literally, for all intents and purposes, eradicated," a senior

Pentagon official said. Russia, he said, is trying to mobilize some 60,000 reservists to fill the gap in manpower.

Ahead of the coming offensive, Moscow appointed Army Gen. Aleksandr Dvornikov, who leads the southern military district that is responsible for operations in Donbas, to oversee the campaign, a U.S. official said. In the initial phase of the war, when Russia attacked from multiple directions, commanders of four military districts acted autonomously—a lack of coordination that military analysts say hampered Russia's war effort. Moscow hasn't issued an official announcement about Gen. Dvornikov's role.

The tactical situation is more advantageous for Russia on the Donbas front. Russian supply lines are shorter, and the more concentrated area of operations allows Russia to more effectively use air support, Ukrainian and Western military officials said.

This different type of warfare, with large formations facing each other instead of small-unit strikes, is a major reason why Kyiv says it urgently needs heavy weapons, such as artillery, tanks and anti-aircraft batteries that most Western allies have been reluctant to supply so far.

"The battle for Donbas will remind you of the Second World War, with its large operations and maneuvers, the involvement of thousands of tanks, armored vehicles, planes and artillery. And this will not be a local operation, based on what we see in Russia's preparations," Ukraine Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said after meeting North Atlantic Treaty Organization ministers this past week. "Either you help us now—and I'm speaking days, not weeks—or your help will come too late and many people will die."

While Ukraine initially sought Soviet-designed heavy weapons systems that its troops are trained to use, the limited supply of this equipment and ammunition, combined with the prospect of a lengthy conflict, mean that Kyiv is now requesting purchases of NATO-standard heavy weapons, Ukraine Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said.

"The Soviet-made weapons that we have obtained can only strengthen Ukraine for a short time," he said in a speech posted by the Ministry of Defense.

Ukraine managed to win the first round of the war because of close-contact infantry engagements, he said, but now Russia has changed its tactics and is relying more on long-range artillery, aviation and missile strikes—weapons that Ukraine has limited ability to counter.

"The war is entering the phase of competition for resources, which are almost unlimited in Russia in comparison to Ukraine," Mr. Reznikov said. "To win in this war, we need a different kind of assistance from what we received before."

Western leaders are stepping up support. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who Saturday took a walk around Kyiv with Mr. Zelensky, announced new military and other assistance that includes 120 armored vehicles and new antiship missile systems. That is on top of Friday's package of Starstreak short-range anti-aircraft missiles, 800 more antitank missiles and high-tech munitions that loiter above targets for precision strikes.

"This war will be won on the battlefield," European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell tweeted on Saturday. He traveled to Kyiv on Friday, along with the head of the European Commission, which afterward said the EU is proposing 500 million euros, equivalent to \$544 million, in new support for Ukraine's military, on top of 1 billion euros previously allocated for weapons.

The U.S. announced \$400 million in additional military aid to Ukraine in April, out of a total of \$1.4 billion since the war started Feb. 24. Washington is supplying Javelins, Stinger missiles, hundreds of Switchblade loitering drones and counter-artillery radars—but, so far, no heavy weapons requested by Kyiv.

Only the Czech Republic has supplied Ukraine with tanks, sending Soviet-designed T72Ms, while Slovakia shipped to Ukraine its S-300 air-defense system after the deployment of Patriot batteries to replace it.

Before Russia's full-scale invasion began in February, Ukraine controlled about two-thirds of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions that comprise Donbas. The rest were governed by the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics, statelets created following Russia's intervention in 2014, when Moscow also annexed Crimea from Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin in February recognized these statelets in their claimed borders that cover the entirety of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, including the cities of Kramatorsk, Slovyansk and Severodonetsk that remain under Ukrainian control.

Ukraine, meanwhile, is slowly trying to retake the only regional capital still in Russian hands, the southern city of Kherson. Fighting has inched to the northern outskirts of the city, with artillery barrages audible to residents almost every night. On Sunday, several hundred Kherson residents gathered in the city with Ukrainian flags for a protest rally that was dispersed by Russian troops firing in the air, according to eyewitness accounts.

Unlike in the northern regions of Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy, where support for Ukraine's independence from Russia has long run high, Moscow can count on at least some cooperation from locals in Donbas and nearby areas of eastern and southern Ukraine, where some part of the population is sympathetic to Russia. In the Luhansk region, four city mayors have already switched sides and begun collaborating with the Russian military, including the mayor of the front-line city of Rubizhne, according to the regional administration.

In besieged Mariupol, where fierce Ukrainian resistance continues in parts of the city, tying up a large Russian force, a member of the city council from a pro-Russian political party has assumed mayor's duties under the auspices of Russian occupation forces, according to his appearances on Russian TV. Ukraine said it has begun treason proceedings against him.

At least 5,000 people, and possibly many more, have died in Mariupol under Russian shelling and bombing, according to the city's elected mayor. Russian state media usually blame the destruction there, and elsewhere in Ukraine, on Ukrainian "Nazis" who allegedly shell their own cities to incriminate Moscow.

In an unusually frank admission, Aleksandr Sladkov, Russian state television's military commentator, wrote in a social-media post that Mariupol is being leveled to present an example to the rest of Ukraine.

"Let them see in Kyiv and Lviv, Cherkasy and Poltava, Ternopil and Chernivtsi—if the city doesn't surrender, it gets annihilated," he wrote. "The cities of central and western Ukraine will also be destroyed if they decide to resist Russian troops."

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HEADLINE	04/10 Fleeing Putin exodus of educated Russians
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/fleeing-putin-thousands-of-educated-russians-are-moving-abroad-11649583003?mod=hp_lead_pos8
GIST	<p>Hundreds of thousands of professional workers, many of them young, have left Russia since its invasion of Ukraine, accelerating an exodus of business talent and further threatening an economy targeted by Western sanctions.</p> <p>Those leaving the country include tech workers, scientists, bankers and doctors, according to surveys, economists and interviews with emigrants. They are departing for countries including Georgia, Armenia and Turkey. More are expected to follow.</p>

A mid-March survey by OK Russians, a nonprofit helping people leave the country, estimated that around 300,000 workers had departed since the war started in late February. While precise counts of the number of people leaving Russia aren't available, some economists have reached similar conclusions about the scale of the outflow. Around 500,000 people left Russia in 2020, according to Rosstat, Russia's statistics agency.

"The people who are either leaving or planning to leave are highly educated and generally young," said Elina Ribakova, deputy chief economist at the Institute of International Finance. "This is your most productive part of the labor force that is disappearing."

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, a top regional development bank, expects the Russian economy to [contract 10% this year](#).

It added that people leaving Russia, coupled with reduced investment and trade, would result in lower long-term productivity growth. [Spending on information technology](#) is expected to drop sharply.

While Russia has encouraged [dissenters to leave](#), it has also acted to stem the outflow of professional workers. President [Vladimir Putin](#) signed in March a decree granting a waiver from military conscription to people employed in the tech sector. Russian authorities are also offering tax breaks, cheaper loans and preferential mortgages to entice tech workers to stay.

"Of course, this mobility [of workers] remains and may even accelerate, but the government has already taken measures," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said recently.

The outflow of workers represents a fraction of Russia's 145 million people. Mr. Putin's [approval rating in Russia](#) has risen since the Ukraine invasion was launched Feb. 24—to 83% in March from 71% in the prior month—according to Levada Center, an independent Russian pollster. Levada has also found much higher support for the war among older respondents than younger Russians.

The tech industry, until recently one of the fastest-growing sectors in the Russian economy, has already lost between 50,000 and 70,000 workers, according to data presented by the Russian Association for Electronic Communications during a March 22 committee hearing at the State Duma, the lower house of Parliament. The group said it expects as many as 100,000 more to follow in April.

The Russian tech industry employs around 1.3 million people, or about 1.7% of the country's workforce, according to the U.S. International Trade Administration's October 2021 Russia overview.

Many people leaving are taking their businesses with them. Some top managers of state-owned and private companies have departed in recent weeks.

Sasha Kazilo, co-founder of the startup Funexpected, which makes apps to help preschoolers learn math, recently left Russia for Paris. She took her family and business with her. Around 15 developers at the business have already left or are in the process of moving, she added.

When the war started, she said she thought, "It was all a nightmare, and we had to wake up." After her husband, Leonid Rybnikov, was jailed for 13 days for posting antiwar stickers in their neighborhood, they decided it was time to leave. In Paris, they have friends, and her husband has secured a research job.

"Before the war, maybe I was under the illusion that things could change in Russia and we could build our company there," she said. "I can't imagine that anymore."

Andrey Panov said he resigned as deputy chief executive officer of Aeroflot-Russian Airlines PJSC, the state-owned carrier, and left 10 days after the invasion began.

“I decided it was just impossible to work for a state-owned company,” he said from Israel, where he is currently based. “The country changed in the matter of one week.”

The Russia CEO of the tech company Yandex, Elena Bunina, said in a message on an internal company forum that she left the country for Israel and would be quitting later this month. Two Yandex employees familiar with the matter confirmed the announcement, which was published by Russian media.

“I can’t live in a country that goes to war with its neighbors,” Ms. Bunina wrote.

Dozens of Yandex workers, particularly programmers, have left Russia and continued to work for the company from other countries, according to several people at the company.

Yandex, the classified-ad site Avito, the commercial bank Tinkoff and the software firm DataArt have collectively flown more than 1,000 workers to Turkey, according to people familiar with the matter. Yandex said that it offers an opportunity to work remotely and that some employees work from different locations. DataArt said it is exiting Russia and expects several hundred additional employees to leave the country by this summer.

Those who study Russia said the pace at which people are departing hasn’t been seen since the 1917 revolution, when millions of the Russian nobility and educated upper-middle classes fled the emerging Communist state. Several million of Russians left after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, but did so over several years.

“The initial exodus happened in the matter of weeks—we haven’t seen such a concentrated wave of emigration from Russia in more than 100 years,” said Konstantin Sonin, a professor at the University of Chicago. He said he regularly receives messages from friends in Russia who have crossed the border.

The post-invasion departures mark a new chapter of an exodus of professionals from Russia over the past decade. Emigration, particularly among the young and well-educated, picked up after Mr. Putin’s third term started in 2012 and Western sanctions hit Russia following its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.

OK Russians’ surveys found that the average age of those who have left was 32 and that 80% had at least some higher education. Just 3% said they plan to return to Russia in the coming months, and around a third were undecided. They cited opposition to the war, fear of repression and a lack of economic prospects as the main reasons for their departures.

In the first month of the invasion, around 50,000 Russians arrived in Armenia and more than 250 Russian companies relocated there, roughly triple the number of relocating businesses during the same period of 2021, according to Hovsep Patvakanyan, chief executive of the consulting company Invest in Armenia.

President Biden, in a March 26 speech in Warsaw, said the exodus from Russia was “a remarkable brain drain in such a short period of time.”

Others still in Russia are waiting for visas, job applications or the school year to end. According to the recruiting-data provider HeadHunter, around 40% of Russian applicants for information-technology jobs are considering moves abroad. A Facebook group called “Time to get out” has about 230,000 members who discuss topics such as finding flights, acquiring documentation and transferring money abroad.

Kirill Rozhkovskiy, a Moscow-based entrepreneur, is planning to leave and build his next startup abroad. He said the Russian marketplace has shrunk, foreign investment has dwindled and access to foreign technology has disappeared. Even the exchange of ideas has become much more limited, he added.

	<p>“The only answer is to go to a country that doesn’t have all of this,” Mr. Rozhkovskiy said.</p> <p>At the St. Petersburg-based Open Business School, departures have contributed to a drop in enrollment, said Sergey Fedorov, head of the school. Only eight students have registered so far for the private school’s first-year M.B.A. course that starts in May. That is down from the usual class of about two-dozen, he said.</p> <p>“There won’t be demand for us,” he said. “We had big plans for growth before the war. Now we have to put those to rest.”</p> <p>Those fleeing include some of Russia’s top doctors. Alexander Vanyukov, who headed the surgical department at Moscow’s Clinical Hospital No. 52, one of the capital’s main centers for Covid-19 patients, left Russia for Latvia with his family a week after the war began.</p> <p>He said he and several other doctors who departed had their doubts about leaving, given their responsibilities to patients and colleagues. But Russian authorities had made the decision for them.</p> <p>“Smart, honest, decent people are no longer needed there,” Dr. Vanyukov said over the phone from Latvia. “In the situation in which Russia finds itself, they are not only not needed, but their presence is counterproductive.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Israel steps up campaign against Iran
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/israels-war-between-the-wars-with-iran-expands-across-middle-east-11649595603?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>TEL AVIV—The Israeli military says it has carried out more than 400 airstrikes in Syria and other parts of the Middle East since 2017 as part of a wide-ranging campaign targeting Iran and its allies, offering its fullest picture yet of its undeclared war with Tehran.</p> <p>Israeli leaders refer to the campaign as the “war between the wars,” which they say is aimed at deterring Iran and weakening Tehran’s ability to hit Israel in the event of an open war between the two regional adversaries.</p> <p>Israel’s airstrike campaign in Syria has hampered Iran’s military ambitions, military analysts say, but it has also pushed the conflict into other arenas, with both countries now battling at sea, in Iran, and above Israel’s skies.</p> <p>“It’s not 100% success,” said Maj. Gen. Amikam Norkin, who retired last week as head of Israel’s air force, where he served as architect of the campaign. “But without our activity, the situation here might be much more negative.”</p> <p>Among the targets hit by Israel: Russian-supplied air-defense systems, drone bases operated by Iranian military advisers, and precision-guided missile systems bound for Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon.</p> <p>The strikes have also killed more than 300 people, including Iranian military commanders, Syrian soldiers, militants backed by Tehran and at least three civilians, according to open-source reporting by Stephane Cohen of NorthStar Security Analysis, an Israel-based consulting firm.</p> <p>The Israel campaign started with a narrow focus in Syria on Iranian arms shipments bound for Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon. Over time, it expanded to target Iran-backed fighters in Syria and then began directly striking Iranian military positions in Syria.</p> <p>The campaign has resulted in Iran’s forces largely retreating from positions near the Israeli border to safer spots in eastern Syria, said Carmit Valensi, a research fellow at Israel’s Institute for National Security</p>

Studies. “It is an effective strategy, but insufficient to deal with Iran’s full-fledged entrenchment and the threats it possesses,” she said.

Iran maintains broad influence in Syria, retains its clout with the country’s leadership, and continues to provide Hezbollah with sophisticated missile systems capable of hitting Israel with increasing accuracy, military analysts said.

Iranian and Syrian officials dismissed the air campaign’s effectiveness.

“Out of 20 or 25 strikes, only two typically destroy their targets,” said an Iranian official close to the country’s security services. The official said Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is responding in-kind to Israeli strikes.

“The Guards have drawn a red line,” the official said. “If you attack us, we will retaliate, an eye for an eye.”

A Syrian government adviser said the Israeli strikes hadn’t significantly dented Iran’s military influence in Syria. The Iranians “are strengthening their presence” across the country, he said. “It is quite difficult to undermine their position.”

In a series of interviews with The Wall Street Journal, Gen. Norkin and other Israeli military officials offered the most far-reaching detail to date of their strategy against Iran.

At the Israeli military headquarters in Tel Aviv, Gen. Norkin showed a map of Syria dotted with hundreds of small orange symbols, each one, he said, marking an Israeli strike against Iran and its allies. Parts of Syria were completely obscured by the orange icons.

The strikes stretched across the country, with a central focus around Damascus and near Syria’s border with Israel. In all, the Israeli military said, it had carried out more than 400 airstrikes as part of its “between the wars” campaign, with most hitting targets in Syria. Israel says it has also hit a smaller number of targets in Lebanon and Iraq.

“When I got this position, I never dreamed that we would act like this,” Gen. Norkin said.

Israel’s campaign against Iran in Syria—long an open secret—has become a matter of public debate in Israel amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Israel has an understanding with Moscow, another key backer of the Syrian government, that Russia won’t interfere with Israel’s airstrikes in Syria.

The dynamic has contributed to Israel’s limited support for Ukraine following Russia’s invasion.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky criticized Israel for not providing Kyiv with weapons to fight Russian forces, but Israeli leaders worry that doing so would anger Moscow and jeopardize their ability to easily target Iran assets in Syria.

Israel and Russia use a hotline to avoid Russian casualties from Israeli airstrikes in Syria. Israeli officials said they have used the line to warn Russia before targeting military bases in Syria when Russian forces work with Iranians.

For years, Israel didn’t acknowledge most of the attacks in Syria. In 2018, Israeli leaders offered their first confirmation that they were carrying out a wide-ranging campaign when they said Israel had carried out 200 airstrikes in Syria in 18 months.

In 2018, Israel said it hit an Iranian drone hangar at a Syrian military base after shooting down an Iranian drone that flew into Israel. The following year, Israel said it hit Iranian weapons warehouses in Damascus.

Last year, Syria accused Israel of carrying out a series of strikes that killed 57 Syrian soldiers and pro-Iranian fighters. Last month, Iran accused Israel of a strike in Syria that killed two Revolutionary Guard officers. Iran vowed to exact revenge.

Retired Gen. Assaf Orion, who once oversaw planning for the Israeli military, said Israel's campaign had set back Iran's ability to retaliate against Israel. But the strategy has created other risks for Israel.

"With several exchanges of blows between Israel and Iran becoming direct and open—at sea, drone and missile attacks—the risk for escalation also grows," he said.

The Iran-Israel shadow war is shifting into a new phase with more reliance on drones.

Last year, the Israeli military said, Iran launched drones from its own military bases bearing small arms bound for Palestinian fighters in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, eschewing its usual strategy of having proxies in neighboring countries target Israel. Israel kept the details secret for 14 months, a sign of how sensitive the shadow war is for regional leaders.

Israel has also used small quadcopter drones to carry out strikes inside Iran, according to people familiar with the covert campaign.

The Israeli military provided the Journal with access to debris from what officials said were three Iranian drones that Israel shot down.

Israeli military experts estimate that the largest drone, with a 23-foot wingspan, can fly more than 1,200 miles. An Israeli pilot shot it down while flying an advanced F-35 jet fighter last year. It was one of two launched from Iran, more than 1,000 miles from Israel's border, according to the Israeli military.

An analysis done for the Journal by Red Six Solutions, a private consulting firm, concluded that the drone was an Iranian version of the U.S. RQ-170 Sentinel that Iran brought down in 2011.

Red Six identified the engine of the second downed drone as a Chinese-made model that was used frequently by fighters in Yemen, Iraq and Syria whom the U.S. says Iran supplies. A similar drone, called a Samad, was used to hit a U.S. base in Erbil, Iraq, last April, the company said.

The Iranian drone threat has become a top concern for Israeli leaders, who publicly released satellite images of Iranian drone bases last November and warned Tehran that Israel wouldn't tolerate expansion of the program.

"Sometimes the use of force, and a demonstration of it, is able to prevent the need for a stronger use of force," Defense Minister Benny Gantz said at the time.

Satellite imagery released in February revealed damage to a drone base in the western Iranian province of Kermanshah, which Israel's Haaretz newspaper said was targeted by an Israeli drone attack.

Four weeks later, Iran launched a barrage of missiles at a compound in Erbil, Iraq, that Tehran said was used by Israeli spies to carry out the attack on its drone operations.

Iraqi officials dismissed the Iranian accusations as misguided, but the attack sent a distinct message to Israel and highlighted the risks of escalating conflict.

The evolving war extends to the sea, where clandestine Israeli teams have attacked ships carrying Iranian oil, triggering similar attacks from Iran targeting a variety of ships in the Gulf of Oman, the Journal has reported.

Israel has also carried out a series of attacks in recent years that have hit Iran's nuclear and military programs, according to people familiar with the campaign. Iran accused Israel of killing one of its top

	<p>nuclear scientists in 2020 and carrying out an attack on its underground nuclear program at Natanz in 2021.</p> <p>Gen. Norkin said Israel's campaign would continue as long as Iran remains a threat.</p> <p>"If you can push [open] war into the future, we achieve a lot," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/11 China inflation rises: lockdowns, war
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-inflation-rises-as-lockdowns-ukraine-war-drive-up-prices-11649659509?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>SINGAPORE—Inflation in China picked up in March as soaring global commodity prices and lockdowns in major cities drove up prices for consumers and businesses.</p> <p>The overall inflationary picture in China remains far more benign than in the U.S. and other major economies, though, giving the government and central bank ample room to support the slowing economy with stimulus.</p> <p>Consumer prices in March were up 1.5% from a year earlier, biggest annual jump in three months, while the prices charged by companies at the factory gate were up more than 8%, exceeding the expectations of economists polled by The Wall Street Journal.</p> <p>The inflation data highlight how China's stringent pandemic control measures are increasingly affecting consumer prices, with the cost of some everyday goods rising rapidly while prices for services drop as consumers stay home.</p> <p>Data from the National Bureau of Statistics Monday show prices for fresh vegetables up an annual 17% in March, fruit prices up 4.3% and the price of flour up 4.6%. On the flip side, prices for airfares and tickets to tourist hot spots tumbled. Gasoline prices were up 25% as Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent global oil prices rocketing.</p> <p>China's zero-tolerance strategy for combating Covid-19 faces its sternest test with the fast-spreading Omicron variant of the virus, which is damping consumer spending, clogging up supply chains and casting doubt on whether the government can meet this year's economic-growth goal of around 5.5%.</p> <p>Authorities in March imposed lockdowns in areas including the southern technology hub of Shenzhen and the northeastern industrial province of Jilin. Shanghai, China's most populous city and a financial and commercial powerhouse, remains under lockdown as authorities struggle to contain an outbreak.</p> <p>Ting Lu, chief China economist at Nomura in Hong Kong, said he expects consumer-price inflation in China to accelerate further this year, to around 2%, as households in China keep stocking up on food and other essentials in case they get stuck at home under Covid-19 containment measures.</p> <p>Iris Pang, chief economist for Greater China at ING in Hong Kong, said that rate would still be "extremely mild" compared with inflation in the U.S., where consumer prices are notching gains not seen in 40 years. Economists polled by The Wall Street Journal expect the U.S. consumer-price index for March to be up 8.4% from a year earlier.</p> <p>That means while the Federal Reserve is signaling a series of interest-rate increases in the U.S., the People's Bank of China is expected to ease policy further to buttress growth, which is sputtering in China as Covid-19 spreads and export growth and the real-estate sector slow.</p> <p>"For China, inflation is not really an issue for now," Ms. Pang said.</p>

	<p>Producer prices also rose in March, data showed. Prices charged by companies at the factory gate were up 8.3% from a year earlier, a slower pace than February's 8.8% but faster than the 8% that economists polled by The Wall Street Journal were expecting.</p> <p>Producer prices in March were up 1.1% from February, double the previous 0.5% monthly gain, as geopolitics and other international factors drove up commodity prices, said Dong Lijuan, a senior statistician with China's statistics bureau. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has pushed up prices for commodities ranging from oil to nickel to wheat, heaping costs on factories world-wide.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Average gas price drops \$.10 to \$4.27/gal
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/average-us-gas-price-drops-10-cents-427-83998106
GIST	<p>CAMARILLO, Calif. -- The average U.S. price of a gallon of regular-grade gasoline dropped 10 cents over the past two weeks to \$4.27 per gallon as oil prices continue to "yo-yo," industry analyst Trilby Lundberg said Sunday.</p> <p>The price at the pump was \$1.32 above what it was one year ago, according to the Lundberg Survey taken Friday.</p> <p>Nationwide, the highest average price for regular-grade gas was in Los Angeles, at \$5.85 per gallon. The lowest average was in Tulsa, Oklahoma, at \$3.52 per gallon.</p> <p>According to the survey, the average price of diesel was \$5.13 per gallon, down 2 cents over two weeks.</p> <p>Lundberg said prices dropped dramatically in the past two weeks, in part because higher prices reduced demand during the second half of March.</p> <p>However, the drop isn't predictive of further declines because among other things, the global oil supply is tight due to a dip in output last month by OPEC, Lundberg said.</p> <p>The war in Ukraine also has sparked global uncertainty. The U.S. has banned all Russian energy supplies but Lundberg said sanctioned Russian oil is still finding "big buyers like India and China happy to pay discount prices."</p> <p>In a bid to reduce spiking energy prices, President Joe Biden last month ordered the release of 1 million barrels of oil per day from the nation's strategic petroleum reserve for six months.</p> <p>On Thursday, the International Energy Agency said that its member countries are releasing 60 million barrels of oil from their emergency reserves on top of previous United States pledges.</p> <p>The Paris-based organization says the new commitments made by its 31 member nations, which include the U.S. and much of Europe, amount to a total of 120 million barrels over six months, the largest release in the group's history.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Pentagon plans for next pandemic
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/covid-mission-pentagon-plans-pandemic-84005660
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON -- A COVID-19 patient was in respiratory distress. The Army nurse knew she had to act quickly.</p> <p>It was the peak of this year's omicron surge and an Army medical team was helping in a Michigan hospital. Regular patient beds were full. So was the intensive care. But the nurse heard of an open spot in an overflow treatment area, so she and another team member raced the gurney across the hospital to claim the space first, denting a wall in their rush.</p>

When she saw the dent, Lt. Col. Suzanne Cobleigh, the leader of the Army team, knew the nurse had done her job. "She's going to damage the wall on the way there because he's going to get that bed," Cobleigh said. "He's going to get the treatment he needs. That was the mission."

That nurse's mission was to get urgent care for her patient. Now, the U.S. military mission is to use the experiences of Cobleigh's team and other units pressed into service against the pandemic to prepare for the next crisis threatening a large population, whatever its nature.

Their experiences, said Gen. Glen VanHerck, will help shape the size and staffing of the military's medical response so the Pentagon can provide the right types and numbers of forces needed for another pandemic, global crisis or conflict.

One of the key lessons learned was the value of small military teams over mass movements of personnel and facilities in a crisis like the one wrought by COVID-19.

In the early days of the pandemic, the Pentagon steamed hospital ships to New York City and Los Angeles, and set up massive hospital facilities in convention centers and parking lots, in response to pleas from state government leaders. The idea was to use them to treat non-COVID-19 patients, allowing hospitals to focus on the more acute pandemic cases. But while images of the military ships were powerful, too often many beds went unused. Fewer patients needed non-coronavirus care than expected, and hospitals were still overwhelmed by the pandemic.

A more agile approach emerged: having military medical personnel step in for exhausted hospital staff members or work alongside them or in additional treatment areas in unused spaces.

"It morphed over time," VanHerck, who heads U.S. Northern Command and is responsible for homeland defense, said of the response.

Overall, about 24,000 U.S. troops were deployed for the pandemic, including nearly 6,000 medical personnel to hospitals and 5,000 to help administer vaccines. Many did multiple tours. That mission is over, at least for now.

Cobleigh and her team members were deployed to two hospitals in Grand Rapids from December to February, as part of the U.S. military's effort to relieve civilian medical workers. And just last week the last military medical team that had been deployed for the pandemic finished its stint at the University of Utah Hospital and headed home.

VanHerck told The Associated Press his command is rewriting pandemic and infectious disease plans, and planning wargames and other exercises to determine if the U.S. has the right balance of military medical staff in the active duty and reserves.

During the pandemic, he said, the teams' make-up and equipment needs evolved. Now, he's put about 10 teams of physicians, nurses and other staff — or about 200 troops — on prepare-to-deploy orders through the end of May in case infections shoot up again. The size of the teams ranges from small to medium.

Dr. Kencee Graves, inpatient chief medical officer at the University of Utah Hospital, said the facility finally decided to seek help this year because it was postponing surgeries to care for all the COVID-19 patients and closing off beds because of staff shortages.

Some patients had surgery postponed more than once, Graves said, because of critically ill patients or critical needs by others. "So before the military came, we were looking at a surgical backlog of hundreds of cases and we were low on staff. We had fatigued staff."

Her mantra became, "All I can do is show up and hope it's helpful." She added, "And I just did that day after day after day for two years."

Then in came a 25-member Navy medical team.

"A number of staff were overwhelmed," said Cdr. Arriel Atienza, chief medical officer for the Navy team. "They were burnt out. They couldn't call in sick. We're able to fill some gaps and needed shifts that would otherwise have remained unmanned, and the patient load would have been very demanding for the existing staff to match."

Atienza, a family physician who's been in the military for 21 years, spent the Christmas holiday deployed to a hospital in New Mexico, then went to Salt Lake City in March. Over time, he said, the military "has evolved from things like pop-up hospitals" and now knows how to integrate seamlessly into local health facilities in just a couple days.

That integration helped the hospital staff recover and catch up.

"We have gotten through about a quarter of our surgical backlog," Graves said. "We did not call a backup physician this month for the hospital team ... that's the first time that's happened in several months. And then we haven't called a patient and asked them to reschedule their surgery for the majority of the last few weeks."

VanHerck said the pandemic also underscored the need to review the nation's supply chain to ensure that the right equipment and medications were being stockpiled, or to see if they were coming from foreign distributors.

"If we're relying on getting those from a foreign manufacturer and supplier, then that may be something that is a national security vulnerability that we have to address," he said.

VanHerck said the U.S. is also working to better analyze trends in order to predict the needs for personnel, equipment and protective gear. Military and other government experts watched the progress of COVID-19 infections moving across the country and used that data to predict where the next outbreak might be so that staff could be prepared to go there.

The need for mental health care for the military personnel also became apparent. Team members coming off difficult shifts often needed someone to talk to.

Cobleigh said military medical personnel were not accustomed to caring for so many people with multiple health problems, as are more apt to be found in a civilian population than in military ranks. "The level of sickness and death in the civilian sector was scores more than what anyone had experienced back in the Army," said Cobleigh, who is stationed now at Fort Riley, Kansas, but will soon move to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland.

She said she found that her staff needed her and wanted to "talk through their stresses and strains before they'd go back on shift."

For the civilian hospitals, the lesson was knowing when to call for help.

"It was the bridge to help us get out of omicron and in a position where we can take good care of our patients," Graves said. "I am not sure how we would have done that without them."

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HEADLINE	04/10 Long Covid perplexes; research underway
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/long-covid-grips-some-washingtonians-and-perplexes-scientists-new-research-underway/
GIST	It's been more than two years since Jarrett Banwart tested positive for the coronavirus, but the 59-year-old has yet to feel back to normal.

Banwart was in excellent health before he got sick in March 2020. An avid cyclist, he used to bike 40 to 50 miles several times a week. He hiked and did yoga and Pilates. He worked a lot, a finance job at a Seattle-based dairy company.

Then came breathing difficulties, body aches, a dry cough and a fever.

Four months later, something else — mainly frequent “brain fog” and severe fatigue — set in, making it hard to exercise, sleep or even work a full day.

Now Banwart, one of the millions of people who’ve developed long-term COVID-19 symptoms, often called “long COVID,” has had to confront a troubling question: “Am I going to get better?”

Doctors generally define long COVID as a post-acute condition that causes a wide range of symptoms for over a month after testing positive for the virus. Scientists have learned a lot [in the past two years](#) about how the disease operates and how to treat it, including the use of existing medication.

But some mysteries, like the condition’s biggest risk factors, still perplex scientists.

In the United States, more than 23 million people (430,000 in Washington) are estimated to have post-acute COVID symptoms, according to [the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation](#), which uses COVID data from Johns Hopkins University. The estimate assumes [30% of survivors](#) suffer from long COVID, a proportion based on a University of Washington study published in February 2021 that followed up with 177 COVID patients up to nine months after infection.

Many similar local research efforts across the country have included a couple of hundred participants. But a new, nationwide study, funded by the National Institutes of Health, is underway, with a plan to follow thousands of COVID patients over four years.

“It’s a huge problem,” said Dr. Janna Friedly, who directs UW Medicine’s post-COVID recovery clinic. “We really need on a national level more resources for these types of coordinated clinics for patients with long COVID. There’s obviously a huge demand and a very large, unmet need.”

The UW Medicine clinic has been seeing 150 to 200 new patients a month, in addition to about 200 more returning patients, Friedly said. Many considered themselves to be “very healthy” before they got sick, though some preexisting symptoms, like diabetes and hypertension, can put people at higher risk of developing long-term symptoms, she said.

And as the clinic gets flooded with new patients, some, like Daisy Sky Shangrow, have to wait months to get an appointment. Shangrow, 26, tested positive last September, and had to wait until December to see a clinic doctor.

“I was like, ‘Wait am I still going to be sick then?’ ” she remembers thinking.

Treatment approach

Research has shown that more than 200 symptoms can arise in post-COVID recovery, Friedly said, though fatigue, cognitive issues, shortness of breath, headaches, chest pains, and loss of taste and smell are among the most common.

“Our approach is very individualized and sort of holistic,” she said. “We look at all the symptoms together, rather than each individual symptom separately.”

There isn’t any one treatment option that works for everyone, but medications for fatigue or autoimmune issues have helped some patients, she said. Clinic doctors also often recommend certain lifestyle changes, like switching to an anti-inflammatory diet or trying to improve sleep.

“A lot of symptoms people experience [are] related to inflammation as a part of an immune system response,” Friedly said. “So focusing on inflammation in the diet is really important — long COVID patients often can’t digest sugar or alcohol.”

She recommended a “Mediterranean diet,” which doesn’t have strict rules but is known to be heart-healthy and include a lot of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Banwart, who’s been trying a more anti-inflammatory diet per the clinic’s suggestion, said he also eats a lot of berries and turmeric.

Physical exercise, depending on a person’s symptoms, and supplements can also help, Friedly said. In addition, her clinic offers group sessions with a rehabilitation psychologist to help patients cope with ongoing anxiety, stress and uncertainty.

Vaccines have also proven to be effective in reducing a person’s risk of developing long-term symptoms, though most people who have already been diagnosed with long COVID and get vaccinated afterward don’t usually see any change in their condition, Friedly said.

In addition, most recent studies point to issues with a person’s immune system response, rather than a result of ongoing virus circulating in a person’s body, meaning long COVID patients aren’t usually contagious after their acute illness passes, she said.

And more research is underway.

Last month, UW Medicine, Swedish Health Services and the Institute for Systems Biology in Seattle joined the nationwide National Institutes of Health study and will contribute data from Pacific Northwest patients. Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center in Spokane also recently joined the study, [The Spokesman-Review reported](#).

The study — known as RECOVER (Researching COVID to Enhance Recovery) — is expected to be the largest and most comprehensive long COVID research effort in the U.S. to date, said Dr. Helen Chu, associate professor of epidemiology, medicine and infectious diseases at the UW.

“I think it’ll give us value essentially in the numbers — the numbers of enrollees and their clinical characterization, and the numbers of blood tests and types of abnormalities we may be able to confirm with larger studies,” said Chu, who will be the study’s lead UW Medicine investigator.

Some critics are concerned NIH’s recruitment efforts have been slow-paced, though initiative leaders have said the process has moved faster than any other study the organization has tackled, [STAT News reported last month](#).

Anyone interested in learning more about the study can visit pnwrecover.org.

Seattleite Ivy Durslag, who’s also been feeling post-COVID symptoms for more than two years, joined the research effort as a participant, curious to learn more about her condition.

She had just come back from a trip to India in March 2020 when she noticed her sense of taste and smell had faded.

“I could smell rubbing alcohol, but nothing else,” remembered Durslag, 71.

Since then, smells have come and gone, she said. Within the first couple of weeks of testing positive, scents of chocolate, wine and coffee started to return. The smell of fruit came back quickly.

But more months passed and Durslag started noticing “phantom smells,” or parosmia, a condition that distorts a person’s sense of smell and has become common for those diagnosed with long COVID.

“I had a bunch of them — burning flesh was a major one,” she said. “Then there was really intensive Mr. Clean smells.”

The smell of stale cigarettes also emerged. About a year after that, another round of parosmia hit her, this time rancid peanut butter. Once, a homemade soup gave her food poisoning because she couldn’t taste that the fish had gone bad, she said.

“I don’t know if it’s going to get any better,” she said. “I’ve learned to cope with it. ... But it has been a debilitating loss for me.”

Hope for recovery

Despite her concerns, Durslag is grateful she hasn’t felt worse symptoms — and that she’s retired and doesn’t have to worry about returning to work.

Others, like Banwart and Shangrow, are still waiting to see what their futures hold.

“Some days are better than others,” said Shangrow, the 26-year-old. Before she got sick, she was working as a music teacher in West Seattle. But when an intense spell of dizziness and nausea sent her to the emergency room in January, she and her school decided she’d move to a more administrative, remote role for the time being — though it came with a pay cut.

The financial toll has been hard on her.

“I’ve put in thousands of dollars to try and heal my body and mind from all of this,” she said. She recently started dance movement therapy, which wasn’t covered by her insurance, and has tried other treatments, like transcranial magnetic stimulation — an FDA-approved practice that sends magnetic pulses into the brain to reinforce neural pathways and communication — to boost her mental health.

“Not only did I lose my income from work, I also had to spend so much more to do the things that helped me get better,” she said.

And even if she was working the same number of hours, she said, her brain fog sometimes got so bad that maintaining basic spreadsheets and other administrative work gave her splitting headaches.

“It was a really surreal way to finish school and start my life post-graduation,” she said.

Fortunately, Friedly said, many of her patients have gradually improved and even fully recovered, though researchers have yet to determine how long the disease usually lasts.

For Shangrow, things have started looking up in the past month or so, and she’s now working on applying to graduate school for the fall.

Durslag said last week that she’s starting to taste most foods again, though some smells, like fresh paint, are still gone.

Banwart took some time off work to drive cross-country last fall, camping and taking short bike rides along the way.

“It was cathartic,” he said. “I was refreshed and, I won’t say energized, but I had a new attitude.” Some medications, spurts of high-intensity training exercises, and friend and family support also help a lot, he said.

And Friedly herself [struggled with ongoing symptoms for nine months](#) after becoming infected early in the pandemic. She’s since fully recovered.

	<p>"I do think a lot of our strategies and treatment approaches are able to help change the course of the condition," she said. "And there's a lot of hope in the research that's coming out."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Tensions soar in the Holy Land
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/israel-middle-east-tel-aviv-west-bank-religion-71bd1f3e308f8e52bca6815f058ede77
GIST	<p>TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israeli troops on Sunday shot and killed an unarmed Palestinian woman in the occupied West Bank and Palestinians set fire to a shrine revered by Jews, Israeli and Palestinian officials said. It was the latest episode of violence during the holy month of Ramadan.</p> <p>Tension has been escalating as Ramadan this year converges with major Jewish and Christian holidays. Protests during Ramadan last year boiled over into an 11-day war between Israel and Gaza militants.</p> <p>The Israeli army said it fired at the woman's lower body after she approached a military checkpoint near the West Bank city of Bethlehem and ignored calls to stop and warning shots fired into the air. The Palestinian Health Ministry said the woman, who was in her 40s, later died from her injuries in a hospital.</p> <p>Palestinian assailants often carry out attacks at checkpoints in the West Bank. But Palestinians and human rights groups say the military often uses excessive force and in some cases has injured or killed people who were not involved in violence. The Israeli military confirmed the woman was found to be unarmed and said the incident was under investigation.</p> <p>Earlier, Brig. Gen. Ran Kochav, the chief military spokesman, told Israeli Army Radio that some 100 Palestinians marched toward Joseph's Tomb in the West Bank city of Nablus late Saturday and set it ablaze before they were dispersed by Palestinian security forces. Images on social media showed parts of the tomb inside the shrine smashed and charred.</p> <p>Joseph's Tomb is a flashpoint prayer site. Some Jews believe the biblical Joseph is buried in the tomb, while Muslims say a sheikh is buried there. The army escorts Jewish worshippers to the site several times a year, in coordination with Palestinian security forces.</p> <p>The incident drew condemnation from Israeli leaders. "The vandalism of Joseph's Tomb is a grave event and a serious violation of freedom of worship in one of the holiest places for every Jew," Defense Minister Benny Gantz tweeted.</p> <p>The incidents come as Israeli forces continued to operate in the northern West Bank city of Jenin and the surrounding area, home to two of the Palestinian attackers who staged deadly attacks against Israelis in recent weeks.</p> <p>Jenin is considered a stronghold of Palestinian militants. Israeli forces often come under fire when operating in the area. Even the Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the occupied West Bank and coordinates with Israel on security matters, appears to have little control there.</p> <p>Late Saturday, Israel announced that it was tightening restrictions on movement in and out of the city, though it continued to allow laborers to enter Israel for work. A raid on the hometown of one of the assailants on Saturday sparked a gunbattle that left at least one Palestinian militant dead.</p> <p>Jenin governor Akram Rajoub denounced the ongoing Israeli activity in the area, called the measures "an expression of collective punishment" meant to disrupt the lives of Palestinians rather than thwart attacks.</p> <p>The army said the forces were making arrests, gathering intelligence and preparing the homes of the attackers for demolition.</p> <p>"We will be at every place at any time as needed to cut off these terror attacks. Israel is going on the offensive," Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett told a meeting of his Cabinet.</p>

	<p>In Sunday's raid, the military said a "violent riot" broke out as forces were operating in the village of Yabad, home to one of the attackers. It said forces opened fire and "neutralized" one Palestinian who threw an explosive at them. It was unclear what his condition was.</p> <p>Forces arrested at least eight suspects and found Israeli military ammunition and uniforms in one of the suspect's homes as well as illegal arms, the military said.</p> <p>Four attacks by Palestinians in recent weeks have killed 14 people in one of the deadliest bursts of violence against Israelis in years.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Homeless 'graying': more retiring on streets
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-business-homelessness-phoenix-c27d2a3747c9ef180452ea09ae59b09b
GIST	<p>PHOENIX (AP) — Karla Finocchio's slide into homelessness began when she split with her partner of 18 years and temporarily moved in with a cousin.</p> <p>The 55-year-old planned to use her \$800-a-month disability check to get an apartment after back surgery. But she soon was sleeping in her old pickup protected by her German Shepherd mix Scrappy, unable to afford housing in Phoenix, where median monthly rents soared 33% during the coronavirus pandemic to over \$1,220 for a one-bedroom, according to ApartmentList.com.</p> <p>Finocchio is one face of America's graying homeless population, a rapidly expanding group of destitute and desperate people 50 and older suddenly without a permanent home after a job loss, divorce, family death or health crisis during a pandemic.</p> <p>"We're seeing a huge boom in senior homelessness," said Kendra Hendry, a caseworker at Arizona's largest shelter, where older people make up about 30% of those staying there. "These are not necessarily people who have mental illness or substance abuse problems. They are people being pushed into the streets by rising rents."</p> <p>Academics project their numbers will nearly triple over the next decade, challenging policy makers from Los Angeles to New York to imagine new ideas for sheltering the last of the baby boomers as they get older, sicker and less able to pay spiraling rents. Advocates say much more housing is needed, especially for extremely low-income people.</p> <p>Navigating sidewalks in wheelchairs and walkers, the aging homeless have medical ages greater than their years, with mobility, cognitive and chronic problems like diabetes. Many contracted COVID-19 or couldn't work because of pandemic restrictions.</p> <p>"It's so scary," said Finocchio, her green eyes clouding with tears while sitting on the cushioned seat of her rolling walker. "I don't want to be on the street in a wheelchair and living in a tent."</p> <p>It was Finocchio's first time being homeless. She's now at Ozanam Manor, a transitional shelter the Society of St. Vincent de Paul runs in Phoenix for people 50 and up seeking permanent housing.</p> <p>At the 60-bed shelter, Finocchio sleeps in a college-style women's dorm, with a single bed and small desk where she displays Scrappy's photo. The dog with perky black ears is staying with Finocchio's brother.</p> <p>A stroke started 67-year-old Army veteran Lovia Primous on his downward spiral, costing him his job and forcing him to sleep in his Honda Accord. He was referred to the transitional shelter after recovering from COVID-19.</p>

“Life has been hard,” said Primous, who grew up on in a once- segregated African American neighborhood of south Phoenix. “I’m just trying to stay positive.”

Cardelia Corley ended up on the streets of Los Angeles County after the hours at her telemarketing job were cut.

Now 65, Corley said she was surprised to meet so many others who were also working, including a teacher and a nurse who lost her home following an illness.

“I’d always worked, been successful, put my kid through college,” the single mother said. “And then all of a sudden things went downhill.”

Corley traveled all night aboard buses and rode commuter trains to catch a cat nap.

“And then I would go to Union Station downtown and wash up in the bathroom,” said Corley. She recently moved into a small East Hollywood apartment with help from The People Concern, a Los Angeles nonprofit.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development said in its [2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report](#) the share of homeless people 50 and over in emergency shelters or transitional housing jumped from 22.9% in 2007 to 33.8% in 2017. More precise and recent nationwide figures aren’t available because HUD has since changed the methodology in the reports and lumps older people in with all adults over 25.

A [2019 study of aging homeless](#) people led by the University of Pennsylvania drew on 30 years of census data to project the U.S. population of people 65 and older experiencing homelessness will nearly triple from 40,000 to 106,000 by 2030, resulting in a public health crisis as their age-related medical problems multiply.

Dr. Margot Kushel, a physician who directs the [Center for Vulnerable Populations](#) at the University of California, San Francisco, said her [research](#) in Oakland on how homelessness affects health has shown nearly half of the tens of thousands of older homeless people in the U.S. are on the streets for the first time.

“We are seeing that retirement is no longer the golden dream,” said Kushel. “A lot of the working poor are destined to retire onto the streets.”

That’s especially true of younger baby boomers, now in their late 50s to late 60s, who don’t have pensions or 401(k) accounts. About half of both women and men ages 55 to 66 have no retirement savings, according to the census.

Born between 1946 and 1964, baby boomers now number over 70 million, the census shows. With the oldest boomers in their mid 70s, all will hit age 65 by 2030.

The aged homeless also tend to have smaller Social Security checks after years working off the books. A third of some 900 older homeless people in Phoenix said in a recent survey they have no income at all.

Teresa Smith, CEO of the San Diego nonprofit Dreams for Change, said she’s also noticed the homeless population is trending older. The group operates two safe parking lots for people living in cars.

Susan, who stayed at one lot, spoke only if her last name wasn’t used because of the stigma surrounding homelessness.

The 63-year-old had kidney cancer while caring for her mother, then lost their two-bedroom apartment after her mom died. The cancer is now in remission.

Susan slept in her car with her dog at one of the gated parking lots that provide a bathroom, showers and a shared refrigerator and microwave.

She was stunned to see a man in his 80s living in a car there, calling it “just wrong.”

But residents enjoyed the community, grilling meals together and even surprising one in their group with a birthday cake.

Dreams for Change recently helped Susan get a one-bedroom apartment with a housing voucher after months of waiting.

With a washer and dryer, patio, dishwasher and bathtub, “I feel like I’m at the Ritz,” she said.

Donald Whitehead Jr., executive director of the Washington-based advocacy group National Coalition for the Homeless, said that seeing older people sleep in cars and abandoned buildings should worry everyone.

“We now accept these things that we would have been outraged about just 20 years ago,” said Whitehead.

Whitehead said Black, Latino and Indigenous people who came of age in the 1980s amid recession and high unemployment rates are disproportionately represented among the homeless.

Many nearing retirement never got well-paying jobs and didn’t buy homes because of discriminatory real estate practices.

“So many of us didn’t put money into retirement programs, thinking that Social Security was going to take care of us,” said Rudy Soliz, 63, operations director for Justa Center, which offers meals, showers, a mail drop and other services to the aged homeless in Phoenix.

The average monthly Social Security retirement payment as of December was \$1,658. Many older homeless people have much smaller checks because they worked fewer years or earned less than others.

People 65 and over with limited resources and who didn’t work enough to earn retirement benefits may be eligible for Supplemental Security Income of \$841 a month.

Finocchio said limited contributions were made for her into Social Security and Medicare because most of her jobs were off the books in telephone sales or watering office plants.

“The programs approved by Congress to prevent destitution among the elderly and the disabled are not working,” said Dennis Culhane, a University of Pennsylvania professor who led the 2019 study of the aging homeless in New York, Boston and Los Angeles County. “And the problem is only going to get worse.”

Jennifer Molinsky, project director for the Aging Society Program at Harvard University’s Joint Center for Housing Studies, agreed the federal government must do more to ensure older Americans are better housed.

“The younger boomers were hit especially hard in the Great Recession, many losing their homes close to retirement,” Molinsky said.

Longer term shelters specifically for older people are helping get some off the streets at least temporarily.

The Arizona Department of Housing last year provided a \$7.5 million block grant for the state’s largest shelter to buy an old hotel to temporarily house up to 170 older people without a place to stay. The city of Phoenix kicked in \$4 million for renovations.

CEO Lisa Glow of Central Arizona Shelter Services, which runs the state's biggest shelter in downtown Phoenix, said the hotel is expected to open by year's end. Residents will stay around 90 days while caseworkers help find permanent housing

"We need more dignified, safer and comfortable places for our seniors," said Glow, noting that physical limitations make it difficult for older people at the 500-bed shelter downtown.

Nestor Castro, 67, was luckier than many who lose permanent homes.

Castro was in his late 50s living in New York when his mother died and he was hospitalized with bleeding ulcers, losing their apartment. He initially stayed with his sister in Boston, then for more than three years at a YMCA in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Just before last Christmas, Castro got a permanent subsidized apartment through Hearth Inc., a Boston nonprofit dedicated to ending homelessness among older adults. Residents pay 30% of their income to stay in one of Hearth's 228 units.

Castro pays with part of his Social Security check and a part-time job. He also volunteers at a food pantry and a nonprofit that assists people with housing.

"Housing is a big problem around here because they are building luxury apartments that no one can afford," he said. "A place down the street is \$3,068 a month for a studio."

Hearth Inc. CEO Mark Hinderlie said far more housing needs to be built and made affordable for the aged, especially now as the numbers of graying homeless people surge.

"It's cheaper to house people than leave them homeless," Hinderlie said. "You have to rethink what housing can be."

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HEADLINE	04/10 China secret delivery missiles to Serbia
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-china-serbia-nato-682ab79c4239f14ecc1133ff5c7addc9
GIST	<p>BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Russian ally Serbia took the delivery of a sophisticated Chinese anti-aircraft system in a veiled operation this weekend, amid Western concerns that an arms buildup in the Balkans at the time of the war in Ukraine could threaten the fragile peace in the region.</p> <p>Media and military experts said Sunday that six Chinese Air Force Y-20 transport planes landed at Belgrade's civilian airport early Saturday, reportedly carrying HQ-22 surface-to-air missile systems for the Serbian military.</p> <p>The Chinese cargo planes with military markings were pictured at Belgrade's Nikola Tesla airport. Serbia's defense ministry did not immediately respond to AP's request for comment.</p> <p>The arms delivery over the territory of at least two NATO member states, Turkey and Bulgaria, was seen by experts as a demonstration of China's growing global reach.</p> <p>"The Y-20s' appearance raised eyebrows because they flew en masse as opposed to a series of single-aircraft flights," wrote The Warzone online magazine. "The Y-20's presence in Europe in any numbers is also still a fairly new development."</p> <p>Serbian military analyst Aleksandar Radic said that "the Chinese carried out their demonstration of force."</p> <p>Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic all but confirmed the delivery of the medium-range system that was agreed in 2019, saying on Saturday that he will present "the newest pride" of the Serbian military on Tuesday or Wednesday.</p>

He had earlier complained that NATO countries, which represent most of Serbia's neighbors, are refusing to allow the system's delivery flights over their territories amid tensions over Russia's aggression on Ukraine.

Although Serbia has voted in favor of U.N. resolutions that condemn the bloody Russian attacks in Ukraine, it has refused to join international sanctions against its allies in Moscow or outright criticize the apparent atrocities committed by the Russian troops there.

Back in 2020, U.S. officials warned Belgrade against the purchase of HQ-22 anti-aircraft systems, whose export version is known as FK-3. They said that if Serbia really wants to join the European Union and other Western alliances, it must align its military equipment with Western standards.

The Chinese missile system has been widely compared to the American Patriot and the Russian S-300 surface-to-air missile systems although it has a shorter range than more advanced S-300s. Serbia will be the first operator of the Chinese missiles in Europe.

Serbia was at war with its neighbors in the 1990s. The country, which is formally seeking EU membership, has already been boosting its armed forces with Russian and Chinese arms, including warplanes, battle tanks and other equipment.

In 2020, it took delivery of Chengdu Pterodactyl-1 drones, known in China as Wing Loong. The combat drones are able to strike targets with bombs and missiles and can be used for reconnaissance tasks.

There are fears in the West that the arming of Serbia by Russia and China could encourage the Balkan country toward another war, especially against its former province of Kosovo that proclaimed independence in 2008. Serbia, Russia and China don't recognize Kosovo's statehood, while the United States and most Western countries do.

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HEADLINE	04/10 NATO large military presence east border
SOURCE	https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-jens-stoltenberg-military-presence-eastern-border-army-ukraine-russia-war/
GIST	<p>NATO military commanders are working on plans to transform the alliance's presence on its eastern borders to a force capable of taking on an invading army, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told the Telegraph in an interview.</p> <p>Stoltenberg described the alliance's presence on its eastern borders thus far as a relatively small "tripwire" force intended to symbolize the alliance's commitment to defend itself from any Russian attack.</p> <p>Russia's war against Ukraine will change that.</p> <p>"Regardless of when, how, the war in Ukraine ends, the war has already had long-term consequences for our security. NATO needs to adapt to that new reality. And that's exactly what we are doing," Stoltenberg said.</p> <p>"NATO is the most successful alliance in history for two reasons. One is that we have been able to unite Europe and North America. The other is that we have been able to change when the world is changing. Now the world is changing, and NATO is changing."</p> <p>Stoltenberg backed Ukraine's calls on Western allies such as Germany to drop the distinction between defensive and offensive weapons with some members. Berlin has ruled out the provision of offensive weaponry to Kyiv.</p>

	"Ukraine is now defending itself against an invasion. So everything Ukraine does is defensive," Stoltenberg said.
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HEADLINE	04/10 Shanghai residents question quarantines
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/china/shanghai-residents-question-human-cost-chinas-covid-quarantines-2022-04-10/
GIST	<p>SHANGHAI, April 10 (Reuters) - Lu, 99, was a long-time resident at Shanghai's Donghai Elderly Care hospital, her loved ones secure that she was getting round-the-clock care at the city's largest such centre.</p> <p>That was before COVID-19 struck China's biggest city last month, the country's worst outbreak since the virus emerged in Wuhan in late 2019, infecting multiple patients, doctors and care workers at the 1,800-bed facility.</p> <p>Orderlies posted cries for help on social media, saying they were overwhelmed. Relatives told Reuters that there had been several deaths.</p> <p>Lu, whose relatives asked that she be identified only by her surname, had coronary heart disease and high blood pressure. She caught COVID and, though she had no symptoms, was being transferred to an isolation facility, her family was told on March 25.</p> <p>She died there seven days later, the cause of death listed as her underlying medical conditions, her granddaughter said.</p> <p>Among the questions she has about Lu's final days was why elderly patients had to be quarantined separately, away from the care workers most familiar with their conditions under China's quarantine rules.</p> <p>Her frustrations reflect those of many with China's no-tolerance COVID policy. Everyone testing positive must quarantine in specialised isolation sites, whether they show symptoms or not.</p> <p>Shanghai has become a test case for the country's strict policy. Home quarantine is not an option and, until public outrage prompted a change, Shanghai was separating COVID-positive children from their parents.</p> <p>From March 1 to April 9, China's financial hub reported some 180,000 locally transmitted infections, 96% of which were asymptomatic. It reported no deaths for the period.</p> <p>A Donghai staffer who answered the phone on Sunday declined to answer questions, directing Reuters to another department, which did not respond to repeated calls.</p> <p>Asked for comment, the Shanghai government sent a local media report with a first-person account of life at one of the quarantine centres. The unidentified author said he wanted to dispel fears that such sites were terrible, saying he received ample meals and medicine but recommending people bring earplugs and eye masks.</p> <p>The authorities did not offer further comment.</p> <p>The United States has raised concerns about China's COVID approach, advising its citizens on Friday to reconsider travel to China "due to arbitrary enforcement of local laws and COVID-19 restrictions." Beijing dismissed the U.S. concerns as "groundless accusations".</p> <p>'DIDN'T DARE BELIEVE IT'</p> <p>When Lu was being quarantined, the family asked, "Who is going to care for her? Will there be care workers, doctors?," her granddaughter said. "My grandmother is not someone who can live independently.</p>

"If the care worker had COVID and no symptoms, why couldn't they stay together?," she said. "The chaos and tragedies happening in Shanghai this time really boil down to cruel policies."

A relative of Donghai patient Shen Peiying, who gave his surname as Qiu, said he believes the quarantine policy contributed to the April 3 death of the bedridden 72-year-old.

She had not caught COVID, he said, citing test records he saw on China's health app. After weeks of little communication, staff rang to say Shen had died from a chest infection.

Qiu has refused to consent to her cremation, citing such unanswered questions as what care she received after her regular care worker was quarantined.

"If they were all in quarantine, who was there to take care of the patients?," Qiu said.

Shanghai is doubling down on the quarantine policy, converting schools, recently finished apartment blocks and vast exhibition halls into centres, the largest of which can hold 50,000 people. Authorities said last week they have set up over 60 such facilities.

These steps, including sending patients to quarantine sites in neighbouring provinces, have been greeted by the public with a mixture of awe at their speed and horror over conditions, prompting some Shanghai residents to call for home quarantine to be allowed.

While Chinese state media has shown hospitals with just two or three patients per room, patients like those sent to Shanghai's giant exhibition centres say they live side by side with thousands of strangers, without walls or showers and with ceiling lights on at all hours.

Videos on Chinese social media have shown hastily converted quarantine sites, including a ramshackle vacant factory where a number of camping beds were placed, a site made out of shipping containers and a school with a poster saying blankets and hot water were not available.

A source verified the first video. Reuters could not independently verify the others.

Management of such sites has been a concern.

One viral video last week showed patients at a site called the Nanhui makeshift hospital fighting for supplies. Reuters could not reach the facility on Sunday for comment.

Among those posting on social media was Shanghai resident Li Tong, who asked for help after his wife was sent there. He said things got better when more staff arrived to organise the patients but that he was shocked by what the videos showed and what his wife told him.

"I didn't dare believe it, that Shanghai in 2022 could be like this," he said.

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HEADLINE	04/10 Ukraine pressures West: more sanctions
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-calls-more-sanctions-weapons-stop-russias-catastrophe-2022-04-10/
GIST	<p>KYIV/BUZOVA, Ukraine, April 10 (Reuters) - Ukraine said on Sunday it was seeking another round of European Union sanctions against Moscow and more military aid from its allies as Russian forces destroyed an airport and other targets in the east of the country.</p> <p>Russia has failed to take any major cities since it launched its invasion on Feb. 24, but Ukraine says it has been gathering its forces in the east for a major assault and has urged people to flee.</p>

Russian forces fired rockets into Ukraine's Luhansk and Dnipro regions on Sunday, officials said. Missiles had completely destroyed the airport in the city of Dnipro, said Valentyn Reznichenko, governor of the central Dnipropetrovsk region.

The strike had wounded five staffers of Ukraine's state emergency service, said the head of the Dnipro region council, Mykola Lukashuk.

Russia's defence ministry said on Sunday that high-precision missiles had destroyed the headquarters of Ukraine's Dnipro battalion in the town of Zvonetsky.

Reuters could not immediately confirm the reports.

President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Twitter he had spoken on the phone with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz about additional sanctions, as well as more defence and financial support for his country. Zelenskiy also discussed with Ukrainian officials Kyiv's proposals for a new package of EU sanctions, his office said.

In a video address late on Saturday, Zelenskiy renewed his appeal for a total ban on Russian energy products and more weapons for Ukraine.

The EU on Friday banned Russian coal imports among other products, but has yet to touch oil and gas imports from Russia.

NEW SANCTIONS

Mounting civilian casualties have triggered widespread international condemnation and new sanctions.

A grave with at least two civilian bodies has been found in Buzova village near Kyiv, Taras Didych, head of the Dmytrivka community that includes Buzova, the latest such reported discovery since the Russian withdrawal from areas north of the capital.

Ukraine's prosecutor general, Iryna Venediktova, told Sky News that bodies of 1,222 killed Ukrainians had been found in the Kyiv region.

Reuters was not immediately able to confirm the report.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said on Sunday that he expected Russia's newly appointed general overseeing Ukraine to orchestrate crimes and brutality against Ukrainian civilians. He did not cite any evidence.

Moscow has rejected accusations of war crimes by Ukraine and Western countries. The Russian Investigative Committee said on Sunday that Ukrainian soldiers were preparing "another provocation" to accuse Russia of allegedly carrying out mass killings of civilians in Irpin, in the Kyiv region.

It claimed - without providing any evidence - that Ukrainian security service officers were planning to move bodies of locals who died in shelling by Ukraine's own armed forces from a morgue in order to stage alleged war crimes by Russia.

Moscow has repeatedly denied targeting civilians in what it calls a "special operation" to demilitarise and "denazify" its southern neighbour. Ukraine and Western nations have dismissed this as a baseless pretext for war.

HEAVY SHELLING

Some cities in the east were under heavy shelling, with tens of thousands of people unable to evacuate.

	<p>Calls by Ukrainian officials for civilians to flee gained more urgency after a missile strike hit a train station on Friday in the city of Kramatorsk, in the Donetsk region, that was full of people trying to leave.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials said more than 50 people were killed. Russia has denied responsibility, saying the missiles used in the attack were only used by Ukraine's military.</p> <p>Reuters was unable to verify the details of attack.</p> <p>Residents of the region of Luhansk would have nine trains on Sunday to get out on, the region's governor, Serhiy Gaidai, wrote on the Telegram message service.</p> <p>In a Palm Sunday homily, Pope Francis called for an Easter truce in Ukraine and, in an apparent reference to Russia, questioned the value of planting a victory flag "on a heap of rubble".</p> <p>At a sermon in Moscow, Patriarch Kirill, the head of Russia's Orthodox Church and a close ally of President Vladimir Putin, on Sunday called on people to rally around the authorities.</p> <p>Russia's invasion has forced about a quarter of Ukraine's 44 million people from their homes, turned cities into rubble and killed or injured thousands.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Iran: conditions for reviving nuclear deal
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-mps-set-conditions-reviving-2015-nuclear-deal-amid-stalled-talks-2022-04-10/
GIST	<p>DUBAI, April 10 (Reuters) - Iranian lawmakers have set conditions for the revival of a 2015 nuclear pact, including legal guarantees approved by the U.S. Congress that Washington would not quit it, Iranian state media reported on Sunday.</p> <p>Iran and the United States have engaged in indirect talks in Vienna over the past year to revive the 2015 nuclear agreement between Tehran and world powers which then-U.S. President Donald Trump left in 2018 and Iran subsequently violated by ramping up its nuclear programme.</p> <p>Negotiations have now stalled as Tehran and Washington blame each other for failing to take the necessary political decisions to settle remaining issues.</p> <p>Imposing such conditions at a crucial time could endanger a final agreement by restricting negotiators' room for manoeuvre in the talks.</p> <p>"The United States should give legal guarantees, approved by its ... Congress, that it will not exit the pact again," the semi-official Tasnim news agency quoted a statement signed by 250 lawmakers out of a total of 290.</p> <p>The letter also said that under a revived pact the United States should not be able to "use pretexts to trigger the snapback mechanism", under which sanctions on Iran would be immediately reinstated, the Tasnim news agency reported.</p> <p>The lawmakers also said that "sanctions lifted under the reinstated pact should not be reimposed and Iran should not be hit by new sanctions".</p> <p>Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said on Sunday U.S. President Joe Biden should issue executive orders to lift some sanctions on Iran to show his goodwill towards reviving the nuclear pact.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Russia: prisoner exchange with Ukraine
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SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-confirms-prisoner-exchange-with-ukraine-saturday-2022-04-10/
GIST	<p>April 10 (Reuters) - Russian Human Rights Commissioner Tatiana Moskalkova confirmed on Sunday that Russia and Ukraine had carried out a prisoner exchange on Saturday.</p> <p>Moskalkova said that among those returned to Russia were four employees of state atomic energy corporation Rosatom, soldiers and some other civilians.</p> <p>"Early this morning they landed on Russian soil," Moskalkova said in an online post.</p> <p>On Saturday an exchange of truck drivers between Russia and Ukraine was also conducted, Moskalkova said, with 32 Russian truck drivers, 20 Ukrainians and a number of Belarus nationals exchanged.</p> <p>Ukraine Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk had said on Saturday that 12 of its soldiers were being returned after a prisoner exchange with Russia, the third such swap since the start of conflict.</p> <p>Vereshchuk said that 14 civilians were also returning to Ukraine as part of the deal.</p> <p>Moscow has denied targeting civilians in what it calls a "special military operation" aimed at demilitarising its neighbour. Ukraine and its Western allies call this a baseless pretext for war.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 War hurts Russia science; West pulls funds
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/science/ukraine-conflict-hurts-russian-science-west-pulls-funding-2022-04-10/
GIST	<p>LONDON, April 10 (Reuters) - Dozens of international scientists have arrived each year since 2000 at Russia's remote Northeast Science Station on the Kolyma River in Siberia to study climate change in the Arctic environment.</p> <p>Not this year, though.</p> <p>Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Germany's Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry froze the funding used to pay personnel at the research station and to maintain instruments that measure how quickly climate change is thawing Arctic permafrost and how much methane - a potent planet-warming gas - is being released.</p> <p>The funding freeze will probably lead to an interruption of the continuous measurements at the station dating back to 2013, compromising scientists' understanding of the warming trend, said Peter Hergersberg, a spokesperson for the Max Planck Society, which is funded by the German state.</p> <p>"(Russian) colleagues at the Northeast Science Station try to keep the station running," Hergersberg said. He declined to say how much funding was withheld.</p> <p>Reuters spoke with more than two dozen scientists about the impact of the Ukraine conflict on Russian science. Many expressed concern about its future after tens of millions of dollars in Western funding for Russian science has been suspended in the wake of European sanctions on Moscow.</p> <p>Hundreds of partnerships between Russian and Western institutions have been paused if not canceled altogether, the scientists said, as the invasion has unraveled years spent building international cooperation following the Soviet Union's 1991 collapse.</p> <p>Many communication channels are closed and research trips have been postponed indefinitely.</p> <p>The projects affected by the suspension of Western assistance include the construction of high-tech research facilities in Russia, such as an ion collider and a neutron reactor for which Europe had pledged 25 million euros (\$27.4 million).</p>

Such technology would unlock a generation of research that could contribute to everything from fundamental physics to the development of new materials, fuels and pharmaceuticals, scientists said.

Another 15 million-euro (\$16.7 million) contribution toward designing low-carbon materials and battery technologies needed in the energy transition to combat climate change has also been frozen, after the European Union halted all cooperation with Russian entities last month.

"Emotionally, I can understand this suspension," said Dmitry Shchepashchenko, a Russian environmental scientist who studies global forest cover and has been affiliated with the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Austria since 2007.

But for science overall, he said: "This is a lose-lose solution. Global issues like climate change and biodiversity ... can hardly be solved without Russian territory [and] the expertise of Russian scientists."

FROZEN FINANCES

When the Soviet Union broke apart, Russian spending on science plummeted, and thousands of scientists moved abroad or abandoned their fields altogether.

"We felt as scientists that our work was not appreciated," said permafrost scientist Vladimir Romanovskiy, who moved his work to Fairbanks, Alaska, in the 1990s. "There was practically no funding, especially for field work."

Russian funding has since improved, but remains far below that of the West. In 2019, Russia spent 1% of its GDP on research and development — or about \$39 billion, adjusted for currency and price variation — according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Most of that money has been spent in physical science fields, such as space technology and nuclear energy.

By comparison, Germany, Japan and the United States each spend around 3% of their respective GDPs. For the United States, that amounted to \$612 billion in 2019.

Russian science got a boost, though, from partnerships on projects with scientists abroad. Russia and the United States, for example, led the international consortium that launched the International Space Station in 1998.

The head of Russia's space agency, Roscosmos, said this month it would suspend its participation in the space station until sanctions tied to the Ukraine invasion are lifted.

Russian scientists also helped build the Large Hadron Collider, the world's most powerful particle accelerator, at the European Organization for Nuclear Research in Switzerland, known as CERN. In 2012, the collider made the breakthrough discovery of the elusive Higgs boson, which until then had only been theorized.

Scientific camaraderie with Europe continued uninterrupted after Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. But CERN's governing council announced last month it was suspending any new collaboration with Russia.

Germany alone has given some 110 million euros (\$122 million) toward more than 300 German-Russian projects over the last three years. A further 12.6 million euros (\$14 million) in EU funding was awarded to Russian organisations for another 18 projects focusing on everything from Arctic climate monitoring to infectious animal diseases.

Chemist Pavel Troshin recently won Russian state funding for his part in a Russian-German effort to develop next-generation solar cells to power communication satellites. But, with the German side now suspended, the project is up in the air.

Joint projects "are supposed to be done for the benefit of all the world, and cutting out Russian scientists ... is really counter-productive," said Troshin, who works at Russia's Institute for Problems of Chemical Physics.

"I would never expect something like this. It's shocking to me. I'm upset very much."

ARCTIC BLACKOUT

Among the more urgent research efforts on hold are projects to study climate change in the Russian Arctic.

"Two-thirds of the permafrost region is in Russia, so data from there is critical," said Northern Arizona University ecologist Ted Schuur of the Permafrost Carbon Network.

"If you cut off your view of changing permafrost in Russia, you're really cutting off our understanding of global changes to permafrost."

That's alarming for scientists as global warming thaws the long-frozen ground that holds an estimated 1.5 trillion metric tons of organic carbon – twice the amount already in the atmosphere today.

As permafrost thaws, organic material locked within the ice decays and releases more planet-warming gases like methane and carbon dioxide. Scientists fear that such emissions could cause climate change to spiral out of control.

Scientists can use satellites to monitor landscape changes due to thaw, but can't pick up what's happening below ground, which requires on-site research, Schuur said.

Russian scientists have collected and shared permafrost field data for years, but Western researchers aren't sure if those communication channels will remain open. Those datasets were also patchy, due to limited funding to cover the vast region.

Arctic ecologist Sue Natali, at U.S. Woodwell Climate Research Center, said her project's plans for boosting Russian monitoring capability is on hold.

"Instrumentation that was supposed to go out this year has been halted," she said, as her colleagues' travel plans have been canceled.

The U.S. government has issued no clear directive on interacting with Russian institutions, contrary to the European stance.

A State Department spokesperson told Reuters: "We do not hold the people of Russia responsible [for the conflict], and believe that continued direct engagement with the Russian people is essential – including in science and technology fields."

SCIENCE AS COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Projects under the Russian Science Foundation's state-funded 2021 budget of 22.9 billion rubles (\$213 million) had relied on partnerships with India, China, Japan, France, Austria, and Germany, among others.

A spokesperson did not answer Reuters questions about how the halt in European collaboration would affect its work, saying only that the foundation would "continue to support leading teams of researchers and their research projects."

European scientists had been helping to build Russian research sites including the neutron reactor and the ion collider near St. Petersburg, said Martin Sandhop, a coordinator on this EU-funded effort called CremlinPlus.

The facilities would help to drive research in fields like high-energy physics, biochemistry and materials science.

But plans for a 25-million-euro project extension are now suspended and Sandhop's team is redirecting experts and equipment toward European institutions.

Cremlin's neutron detectors needed for the planned reactor, for example, are now going to a facility in Lund, Sweden.

Even if Russia manages to complete the expansion works, it's unclear how valuable the work will be without the suite of tools at Western institutions to analyse the data.

Physicist Efim Khazanov at the Institute of Applied Physics in Nizhny Novgorod, near Moscow, said not having access to European equipment would hurt his work using a high-energy laser to study topics such as the structure of spacetime in a vacuum, which could expand our understanding of the universe.

Khazanov was among thousands of Russian scientists who signed an open letter, posted on the independent online science publication Troitskiy Variant, saying Russia had "doomed itself to international isolation" with its invasion of Ukraine.

Many Russian scientists also fled the country, said Alexander Sergeev, head of the Russian Academy of Sciences, according to Interfax state news agency.

The protest letter was temporarily removed from the site after Russia passed a law March 4 criminalizing "fake news" on the Ukraine campaign.

That day, a letter was published on the state Russian Rectors' Union website in support of Russia's invasion and signed by more than 300 leading scientists, who have since been suspended from European University Association membership.

While foreign funding represents just a small part of Russia's scientific spending, its scientists relied on that money to keep projects and careers afloat.

"Those joint research grants were helping a lot of Russians," lamented Russian geographer Dmitry Streletskiy, at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. "I'm just surprised the EU is targeting scientists, which is not the right crowd to target."

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HEADLINE	04/10 Few cars lots customers autos inflation risk
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/10/business/economy/cars-inflation.html
GIST	<p>Corina Diehl is eager for more sedans and pickup trucks to sell her customers in and around the Pittsburgh area, but as the pandemic enters its third year, cars remain in short supply and the squeeze on inventory shows no sign of abating.</p> <p>“If I could get 100 Toyotas today, I would sell 100 Toyotas today,” Ms. Diehl said. Instead, she said, she’s lucky to have three. “It’s the same with every brand I have.”</p> <p>Dealerships like Ms. Diehl’s are wrestling with inventory shortages — the result of a dearth of computer chips, production disruptions and other supply chain snarls. That’s not a problem just for car buyers, who are paying more; it’s also a problem for economic policymakers as they try to wrestle the fastest inflation in four decades under control.</p>

Car prices have helped push inflation sharply higher over the past year, and economists have been counting on them to level off and even decline in 2022, allowing the rising Consumer Price Index to moderate markedly.

But it is increasingly unclear how much and how quickly car prices will slow their ascent, because of repeated setbacks that threaten to keep the market under pressure. While price increases are showing some early signs of slowing and used car costs, in particular, are unlikely to climb at the same breakneck pace as last year, continued shortfalls of new vehicles could keep prices elevated — even rising — longer than many economists expected.

“We’ve stumbled into another pattern of a series of unfortunate events,” said Jonathan Smoke, the chief economist at Cox Automotive, an industry consulting firm. Shutdowns meant to contain the coronavirus in China, computer chip factory disruptions tied to a recent earthquake in Japan, the aftereffects of the trucker strike in Canada and the war in Ukraine are adding up to slow production.

Mr. Smoke expects new car prices to keep rising this year — perhaps even at nearly the same pace as last year — and used cars to begin to depreciate again, but said the shortage of new cars could spill over to blunt that weakening. And used cars may not fall in price at all if rental companies begin to snap them up as they did in 2021.

“If the supply situation gets worse, it’s still possible that we repeat some of what we had last year,” he said.

Mr. Smoke's predictions — and worries — are more grim than what many economists are penciling into their forecasts.

Alan Detmeister, a senior economist at UBS and former chief of the Federal Reserve Board’s wages and prices section, said he expected a 15 percent decline in used car prices by the end of the year, with new car prices falling 2.5 to 3 percent.

Those estimates are predicated on an increase in supply.

“This is a huge wild card in the forecast,” Mr. Detmeister said. But even if production doesn’t pick up, “it is extremely unlikely that we’ll see the kind of increases we saw last year,” he added, referring to prices.

Omar Sharif, founder of Inflation Insights, a research firm, said he was still expecting improved supply and slower demand to help the used car market come into balance. While used car prices may rise for a few months as households spend tax refunds on automobiles, he expects the increase to be modest in part because they already nearly match new car prices.

“I would be shocked if the used car market really accelerated,” he said. New car prices are a more complicated story, he added: “There, we have legitimately serious inventory problems.”

Automakers are struggling to ramp up production. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has created shortages in electrical components needed for cars, prompting S&P Global Mobility to cut its 2022 and 2023 forecasts for U.S. production. More critically, the chips needed to power everything from dashboards to diagnostics remain in short supply. Ford Motor and General Motors temporarily shut down some U.S. factories last week because of supply issues, and the industry broadly cannot ship as many cars as customers want to buy.

In cars, “production remains below prepandemic levels, and an expected sharp decline in prices has been repeatedly postponed,” Jerome H. Powell, the Fed chair, said during a speech last month. He noted that while supply chain relief in general seemed likely to come over time, the timing and scope were uncertain.

Analysts had been hoping that chip shortages, in particular, would ease up, but “we’ve got at least another year, if not more,” for the supply chain to heal, said Chris Richard, a principal in the supply chain and network operations practice at the consulting firm Deloitte.

While smaller electronics producers may be able to find enough semiconductors, he said, cars contain hundreds or even thousands of chips — often different kinds — and many auto companies do not have direct and close relationships with their providers.

The earthquake in Japan temporarily shut down chip plants that supply the auto industry, costing a few weeks of production at one. Making chips requires neon, and much of it comes from Ukraine. Lockdowns in Shanghai may reduce chip production at some Chinese factories.

At the same time, demand is booming. Ford reported record retail vehicle orders in March, including for its F-series trucks, which remained in demand even as gas prices jumped.

Car buying could begin to slow as the Fed raises interest rates, making car loans more expensive, but so far there is little sign that is happening. In fact, demand has been so strong that automakers have been cracking down on dealers that charge above list price, threatening to withhold fresh inventory.

“I don’t see the prices subsiding. You don’t need them to subside,” said Joseph McCabe at AutoForecast Solutions, an industry analyst, explaining that dealer costs are increasing and companies want to protect their profits. “Prices will go up, and there will be less negotiating space for consumers, because there’s high demand and no availability.”

Mr. McCabe does not think that car inventory will ever fully rebound: Dealers and automakers have learned that they make more money by effectively making cars to order and running with learner inventory. If that’s the case, the permanently restrained supply could have implications for the rental and used car markets.

If car prices keep climbing briskly, it will be hard for inflation overall to moderate as much as economists expect — to around 4 to 4.5 percent as measured by the Consumer Price Index by the end of the year, according to a Bloomberg survey, down from 7.9 percent in February.

That’s because prices for services, which make up 60 percent of the index, are also climbing robustly. They increased 4.8 percent in the 12 months through February, and could remain high or even continue to rise as labor shortages bite.

Of the goods that make up the other 40 percent of the index, food and energy account for about half. Both have recently become markedly more expensive and, unless trends change, seem likely to contribute to high inflation this year. That puts the onus for cooling inflation on the products that make up the remainder of the index, like cars, clothing, appliances and furniture.

While the Fed’s policy changes could tamp down demand and eventually slow prices, policymakers and economists had been hoping they would get some natural help as supply chains for cars and other goods worked themselves out.

“We still expect some deflation in goods,” Laura Rosner-Warburton, an economist at MacroPolicy Perspectives, said of her forecast. She said that she expected fuel prices to moderate, and that her call included some “modest declines” in vehicle prices.

It’s not just economists who are hoping that forecasts for a rebounding supply and more moderate car prices come true. Buyers and dealers are desperate for more vehicles. Ms. Diehl in Pittsburgh sells makes including Toyota, Volkswagen, Hyundai and Chevrolet, and companies have told her that inventory may begin to recover toward the end of the year — a reprieve that seems far away.

	<p>Her customers are hungry for trucks, electric vehicles and whatever else she can get her hands on. When one of her dealerships lists a new car on its website in the evening, a buyer will show up first thing in the morning, she said. Her dealerships have a backlog of 400 to 500 parts to fix cars, up from 10 to 20 before the pandemic.</p> <p>“It’s absolute insanity at its finest,” Ms. Diehl said. “I don’t see an abundance of inventory before 2023 and 2024.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Europe breadbasket: war hits Ukraine farms
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/10/world/europe/ukraine-farmers-food.html
GIST	<p>The farmer was working in his field on a recent morning when a neighbor called to tell him that his warehouses had been shelled. He rushed back and found them on fire and one of his workers lying on the ground with shrapnel lodged in his head.</p> <p>“In one word, it was destruction,” said the farmer, Yuriy Gumanenko, 48. “Everything was destroyed into pieces.”</p> <p>The farmworker, 62, was hospitalized and had little chance of surviving, Mr. Gumanenko said. Three of Mr. Gumanenko’s four tractors were destroyed, and so were the roofs of his warehouses. The wheat he was hoping to sell and many of his seeds were lost.</p> <p>“All my life went to growing my farm,” he said, adding, “Now it’s all gone.”</p> <p>In the past six weeks, Russian shells have destroyed Ukrainian cities, homes, hospitals and schools. But the war has also reached deep into the fertile plains of a region known as Europe’s breadbasket, paralyzing harvests, destroying granaries and crops, and bringing potentially devastating consequences to a country that produces a large share of the world’s grain.</p> <p>Ukraine has already lost at least \$1.5 billion in grain exports since the war began, the country’s deputy agriculture minister said recently. And Russia, the world’s leading grain exporter, has been largely unable to export food because of international sanctions.</p> <p>The combination is creating a global food crisis “beyond anything we’ve seen since World War II,” the chief of the United Nations World Food Program has warned.</p> <p>In Ukraine, warehouses are filled with grain that cannot be exported. Russia has blocked access to the Black Sea, Ukraine’s main export route, cargo trains face logistical hurdles, and trucking is stymied because most truck drivers are men aged 18 to 60 who are not allowed to leave the country and cannot drive agricultural exports across the border.</p> <p>Ukraine has also banned some grain exports to ensure that it has enough food to feed its people.</p> <p>On Tuesday, the Agriculture Ministry said that six large granaries had been destroyed by Russian shelling. Farmers say they face shortages of fuel and fertilizer, and that some of their workers have gone to the battlefield.</p> <p>Some farmers have been pushed off their lands by the fighting, with shells and rockets destroying their machines, wounding their workers and killing their cattle.</p> <p>“My farm has turned to ruins,” said Grigoriy Tkachenko, a farmer in the village of Lukashivka, near the northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv. “There is almost nothing left.”</p>

His farm was shelled on a recent evening at milking time, he said. A rocket struck the milking hall, and the workers ran to another building for shelter. When the attack ended, Mr. Tkachenko's farm had been reduced to rubble and scores of cows and small lambs lay dead.

The farm — his cattle, warehouses and machinery — was the product of his life's work. After working in collective farms when Ukraine was under Soviet rule, Mr. Tkachenko bought about 15 acres of land and seven cows in 2005. Over the years, he expanded his operation to 3,700 acres and 170 cows, also producing corn, wheat, sunflowers and potatoes.

"What we built over decades," he said, "they destroyed it over just a few days."

Farmland covers [70 percent of the country](#) and agriculture was Ukraine's top export, producing nearly 10 percent of its gross domestic product. Ukraine was one of the world's main exporters of [corn and wheat](#) and the biggest exporter of sunflower oil.

The country now has 13 million tons of corn and 3.8 million tons of wheat that it [cannot export using its usual routes](#), primarily by sea, the deputy agriculture minister, Taras Vysotsky, said last week.

One farmer in the Kherson region of southern Ukraine said that he had 1,500 tons of grain and 1,000 tons of corn sitting in storage on his farm.

About 400 miles northwest, near Chernihiv, Ivan Yakub fled his farm after the area was occupied by Russia, leaving 100 tons of corn and wheat in his warehouse.

Farming has become impossible in several areas where there is heavy fighting or that are under Russian occupation.

Farmers also worry whether they will be able to sow crops this spring, putting next season's crops at risk. On Thursday, Ukraine's prime minister, Denis Shmygal, said that the government expected a 20 percent decrease in crops to be sown this spring.

Russian forces have [mined](#) some farmland, blown up machines and destroyed fuel reserves, an effort, Ukrainian authorities say, to disrupt planting.

"I don't know if I will sow," said Oleksandr Kyrychyshyn, a farmer in the village of Blahodativka, in the Kherson region. "They told us that every car that drives out into the field will be shot."

Mr. Yakub, who fled his farm near Chernihiv, still wakes up at 6 a.m. out of habit. He makes tea, but cannot reach his tractor and fertilize his land to prepare for sowing sunflower seeds. His fields, under Russian occupation, remain fallow.

"I paid for the seeds but I can't put them in the ground," he said. "I'm just a farmer, I want to grow what people need."

In less affected areas farmers have started to sow, but many lack fuel, fertilizer and seeds because ports have been blocked and imports from Russia and Belarus halted. A government survey last month found that farmers had 20 percent of the fuel needed for the spring sowing.

Anatoly Guyvaronsky, who represents the Dnipro region in Ukraine's association of farmers and private landowners, said that his grain truck driver and grain elevator operator had gone to fight in the war.

The Ukrainian government has temporarily exempted agriculture workers from military duties, but some have chosen to fight. Women and children are now helping in the fields, Mr. Guyvaronsky said.

Around Ukraine, farmers have shown great displays of resilience and a determination to do everything in their power to sow and feed their people and the army.

Mr. Tkachenko, whose farm was destroyed in a Russian attack last month, had stayed on his land as long as possible, feeding Ukrainian soldiers and the local population with meat, milk and potatoes.

He, his wife, daughter and six grandchildren slept for a few hours a night in the cellar where they put up potatoes and preserves.

“This is our land, this is our farm, this is our village,” Mr. Tkachenko said. “Until the last moment we wanted to be with our people.”

They fled after their farm was attacked but returned last week, as soon as he heard that the Russian army had withdrawn by a few miles.

“Our land is our land,” he said in a phone call as he drove home. “Everyone will rush back to get back to work as soon as they can.”

Mr. Gumanenko, whose farm near Dnipro had been destroyed, spent the days after the attack going through the rubble to see what he could save to start sowing as soon as possible. “If you don’t sow it in time, you lose the harvest,” he said. He said he probably would not be able to find soy seeds, but his friends would give him other kinds.

“They can shoot at us but we’re going to keep working,” he said, adding, “I don’t know any other life. I was born a farmer and I’ll die a farmer.”

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HEADLINE	04/10 Poland-Ukraine ties a target Russia disinfo?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/poland-ukraine-ties-target-russian-disinformation-83992663
GIST	<p>WARSAW, Poland -- Days before Poland’s Independence Day in November, vandals painted the blue-and-yellow colors of the Ukrainian flag on monuments in Krakow. The vandalism, which took place as Russia massed troops near Ukraine’s border, looked as if Ukrainians were defacing memorials to Polish national heroes.</p> <p>Yet some clues suggested otherwise.</p> <p>The flag's colors were reversed, with the yellow on top of the blue and one offensive message was in an unnatural mix of Russian and Ukrainian. Though prosecutors are still investigating, Polish and Ukrainian authorities believe it was most likely a Russian-inspired attempt to trigger ethnic hostility between Ukrainians and Poles.</p> <p>Polish and Ukrainian authorities have for years accused Russia of trying to provoke hostility between their neighboring nations as part of a broader effort to divide and destabilize the West — and the concerns have gained greater urgency since Russia invaded Ukraine.</p> <p>Poland and Ukraine are neighbors and allies but they share a difficult history of oppression and bloodshed, and those historical traumas sometimes rise to the surface.</p> <p>Poland has also accepted large numbers of Ukrainian refugees, creating fears that could become another wedge issue that Russia could exploit.</p> <p>“The Russian efforts to sow divisions between the Poles and Ukrainians, particularly by means of exploiting historical issues, are as old as time,” said Stanislaw Zaryn, the spokesman for Poland’s security services.</p> <p>“Russia has redoubled them since the war began,” he said. “And they are more dangerous now because the war is going on and it can affect more people than before.”</p>

Reacting to the November incident, the Ukrainian Embassy in Warsaw immediately denounced it as “shameful” and “a provocation aimed at harming the good neighborly relations between Ukraine and Poland.”

More than 2.5 million Ukrainian refugees have arrived in Poland since the war began, and while some move on to other countries more than half have remained. Poles have reacted with an outpouring of help and goodwill and the government has extended to the Ukrainians the same rights to education and health care that Poles have.

Never Again, an anti-racism association in Poland, has documented several attempts to stoke aversion to the Ukrainian refugees and even to openly justify Russian President Vladimir Putin’s invasion. In some cases those behind the messages are far-right Polish activists or politicians with pro-Kremlin views, according to a report the organization published Thursday.

“These groups do not enjoy widespread public support, but they do their best to make Poles and Ukrainians quarrel, spread hateful content, conspiracy theories and false information, primarily in the internet space,” it said.

Larysa Lacko, an expert on countering disinformation at NATO, said Russia is known to exploit refugees as a wedge issue because it touches on the economy, race and other sensitive issues, and that she has also observed Russian “disinformation talking about historical grievances.”

Western Ukraine was once under Polish rule, with Ukrainians largely subservient to a Polish landowning class.

Resentments erupted in ethnic bloodshed during World War II, when the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, a nationalist military formation, slaughtered tens of thousands of Poles in the Nazi-occupied Polish regions of Volhynia and Eastern Galicia.

Poland also has a difficult history with Moscow. Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union carved up Poland at the start of World War II in 1939, invading and occupying the country based on a secret clause in the notorious Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Poles suffered atrocities inflicted by both occupying states. The Nazis set up death camps and concentration camps where they murdered Jews and they killed many other Polish citizens as well. Meanwhile, the Soviets sent some Poles to Siberia and murdered 22,000 Polish officers in the Katyn massacres of 1940.

Even after the war, Poland was forced to live under Moscow's oppressive control for the decades of the Cold War.

It still stings Poles to remember the Soviet Union denied the truth of the Katyn killings for decades, forbidding Poles from publicly commemorating the victims. When the Polish wartime government-in-exile asked the International Red Cross to investigate the Nazi disclosures of the Soviet crimes, Moscow smeared the Polish leaders as “Fascist collaborators” — much as they have falsely accused Ukraine today of being a Nazi state.

Some Poles, especially those who lived through the war, remember those times and carry a lingering hostility to both Russians and Ukrainians.

One false claim Polish authorities say Russians are spreading is that Poland seeks to reclaim Lviv and other territory in western Ukraine that once was Polish. “Those claims are untrue,” the Polish Foreign Ministry said in a series of tweets seeking to debunk false claims. “Poland will never accept the annexation of any territory belonging to an independent state.”

Another is that Poland, a NATO ally hosting thousands of U.S. troops, is working to set the West against Russia.

That claim was made recently by former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev, the current deputy chairman of the Russian security council.

“Now the interests of the citizens of Poland have been sacrificed due to the Russophobia of mediocre politicians and their puppeteers from across the ocean with clear signs of senile insanity,” Medvedev wrote recently on Telegram, a social media app popular in Russia and Ukraine.

Zaryn, the Polish security services spokesman, also pointed to a Polish Facebook page called “A Ukrainian is NOT my brother,” whose posts call on followers not to forget the Ukrainian massacres of Poles in the 1940s.

The page was created less than a month after Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and has nearly 55,000 followers. In recent weeks posts have criticized Polish authorities for their strong support for Ukraine.

Zaryn said evidence points to it being run by a woman with ties to a pro-Kremlin party, Zmiana, in Poland. The former leader of the party, Mateusz Piskorski, has worked for Russian news outlets RT and Sputnik and has been charged with espionage for Russia and China.

Poland's government has been taking steps to protect itself, with public warnings about the disinformation attempts and expulsions of dozens of suspected Russian agents and one arrest.

Days after Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, Polish authorities arrested a man they accused of being an agent of the Russian military intelligence agency, GRU, in Przemyśl, a key entry points for Ukrainian refugees, as he sought to cross into Ukraine.

In late March, Poland ordered the expulsion of 45 suspected Russian intelligence officers they accused of using diplomatic status as a cover to operate in the country.

“The illegal activities of these diplomats can also pose a threat to those people who left their country to flee the war and found protection in our country,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Lukasz Jasina said.

At a moment of huge solidarity in Poland and elsewhere with Ukrainians, disinformation is limited in its impact, argued Lacko, the NATO expert working to counter disinformation.

“Given the atrocities on the ground, it’s harder to fall into these sorts of traps,” she said.

But officials in Poland say they have to remain on guard, especially if the number of refugees grows, creating the potential for more social anxieties that can be exploited.

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HEADLINE	04/09 Russia foreign currency rating downgraded
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/9/sp-downgrades-russian-foreign-currency-rating/
GIST	<p>The Standard & Poor’s credit rating agency has downgraded Russia’s foreign currency rating to “selective default” signaling increased risks that Moscow is poised to default on foreign debt for the first time in more than a century.</p> <p>S&P issued the downgrade after Russia made arrangements to pay dollar-denominated bond payments in rubles.</p> <p>“We currently don’t expect that investors will be able to convert those ruble payments into dollars equivalent to the originally due amounts, or that the government will convert those payments within a 30-day grace period,” S&P said in a statement.</p>

	<p>The agency also said the downgrade also reflected its assessment that sanctions targeting Russia “are likely to be further increased in the coming weeks, hampering Russia’s willingness and technical abilities to honor the terms and conditions of its obligations to foreign debtholders.”</p> <p>Russia has committed to paying its foreign debts but has signaled that payments will be made in rubles if its overseas accounts remain frozen.</p> <p>Several rating agencies, including S&P, previously downgraded Russian debt to “junk” status, indicating a high probability of default, in the wake of crushing sanctions levied after the Kremlin invaded Ukraine.</p> <p>S&P issues a “selective default” rating in situations where debtors are likely to default on specific classes of obligations while continuing to make timely payments on others.</p> <p>Russia has not defaulted on its foreign debt since 1917 during the Bolshevik Revolution.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Walgreens begins rationing baby formula
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/9/walgreens-begins-rationing-baby-formula-supply-cha/
GIST	<p>Mothers of infants are the latest group of consumers to feel the pinch of supply chain issues as a major drug-store chain announces it will ration baby formula.</p> <p>Walgreens — the nation’s second-largest pharmacy with over 9,000 locations — is taking the extreme step of limiting purchases of formula, according to the company.</p> <p>A Walgreens spokesperson confirmed they were limiting formula purchases to three per customer, telling CBS MoneyWatch it is due to “increased demand and various supplier issues.”</p> <p>As of last month, 29% of the most popular baby formula products were out of stock across the country, according to Datasembly, which tracked the supply at over 11,000 stores. That number has increased by 17% since November.</p> <p>“This is a shocking number that you don’t see for other categories,” Ben Reich, CEO of Datasembly, told CBS MoneyWatch. “We’ve been tracking it over time, and it’s going up dramatically. We see this category is being affected by economic conditions more dramatically than others.”</p> <p>To make things worse, Abbott Nutrition recalled its powdered baby formula products in February after five infants were hospitalized and two died after they were given the formula, the FDA said.</p> <p>The shortage is troubling, but the Infant Nutrition Council of America urges parents not to hoard formula, advising instead that a 10-to-14-day supply is enough.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Mariupol: Russia ‘filtration camps’
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/9/mayor-vadym-boichenko-mariupol-says-31000-resident/
GIST	<p>The mayor of Mariupol said Russian troops have taken 31,000 residents “at gunpoint” to “filtration camps” elsewhere in occupied Eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>Mayor Vadym Boichenko said on Telegram on Friday that he had verified that Ukrainians from Mariupol were being taken to a camp 35 miles away in Novoazovsk near the Russian border.</p> <p>“People have been waiting there for weeks,” he said as first reported by Ukrinform. “Filtration is very strict - fingerprints are taken, as well as biometrics. They force people to sign various documents.”</p> <p>Russia has been accused of using mass internment camps during the first and second Chechen wars in the mid-1990s and early 2000s.</p>

In a February 2020 report, Human Rights Watch accused Russian guards of torturing, beating and raping civilians at camps during the second Chechen war after receiving testimony from former detainees.

On Tuesday, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield noted credible reports of camps where Ukrainians are being separated and forced to hand over their passports and identification cards.

“I do not need to spell out what these so-called ‘filtration camps’ are reminiscent of,” she said. “It’s chilling and we cannot look away.”

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HEADLINE	04/09 Ukraine braces: war shifts east
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/09/ukraine-battle-east-shift/
GIST	<p>Ukraine is bracing for a new and potentially more challenging phase in its war to repel Russia’s invasion as the battles shift east to new terrain that could give more of an advantage to the Russians.</p> <p>The wide open spaces will make it harder for the Ukrainians to run guerrilla operations as they did in the forests of the north and west and play to Russia’s ability to muster large mechanized formations of tanks and armored vehicles.</p> <p>But much will depend on whether the Russians can rectify the mistakes they made in the first phase of their invasion, ranging from the failure of supply lines, logistical challenges and poor planning to using insufficient manpower for the size of the area they were attempting to seize, analysts say.</p> <p>That the Ukrainians have not only managed to hold the Russian army at bay but also forced its troops into a humiliating retreat from the north of the country is testament both to their fighting ability and to the Russians’ poor performance so far, experts say.</p> <p>Russian forces have now completely withdrawn from the areas around Kyiv and Chernihiv in the north, where their attempt to launch a sweep into the capital was thwarted by fierce Ukrainian resistance, U.S. officials say. Those troops are in the process of being refitted and resupplied, apparently for redeployment to the east, the Pentagon says.</p> <p>In one sign that Russia is trying to fix some of the problems it initially encountered, the Russians have appointed a general with extensive experience in Syria and the Donbas to oversee the war effort, marking the first time a single commander has taken control of the entire Ukraine operation, a senior U.S. official said Saturday, speaking on the condition of anonymity. The appointment of Gen. Alexander Dvornikov, the commander of Russia’s southern military district, signals an attempt by Moscow to bring some coherence to what military experts describe as a chaotically executed operation so far that has taken the lives of seven generals.</p> <p>The new focus of the battle is expected to be the Donbas region, which has been contested since Russia invaded in 2014 and seized a portion of the oblast, or province. Ukraine has since been fighting to maintain control of the rest of the area, and some of its best and most battle-hardened troops are stationed there.</p> <p>The Russians are widely expected to attempt to push south from the Kharkiv area and north from the city of Donetsk to encircle the Ukrainian troops in Donbas, maneuvers that will play to Russia’s numerical superiority in terms of tanks and armored vehicles. In recent days, Ukrainian military officials said, the Russians have begun pushing south from the town of Izyum toward Slovyansk, with the aim eventually of seizing Kramatorsk, the capital of the Donetsk and site of the missile attack on a train station that killed over 50 people on Friday.</p>

The Ukrainians could find themselves confronting a tougher fight in the terrain of the east than they did in the forested north, analysts say. There, trees provided cover for lightly armed fighters to sneak behind Russian lines to fire at tanks and armored vehicles, using anti-tank weapons such as the Javelins supplied by the United States that have helped tilt the war in Ukraine's favor.

The battles in the east will look more like those of "the Second World War, with large operations, thousands of tanks, armored vehicles, planes, artillery," Ukraine's foreign minister told NATO last week, making an appeal for urgent supplies of new and different kinds of arms.

The shifting environment underpins Ukraine's demand for NATO countries to supply more and different kinds of weaponry including tanks, armored vehicles and artillery, U.S. officials say.

"The fight down in the southeast, the terrain is different than it is in the north. It is much more open and lends itself to armor mechanized offensive operations on both sides," Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a congressional hearing last week. The Ukrainians need additional armor and artillery, he said. The United States is looking to NATO allies to come up with the right equipment because the kind used by the United States would require months of training for the Ukrainians to learn how to use, he said.

Fighting in the east also will require the Ukrainians to adopt different tactics to those they used around Kyiv, where they were able to blunt and ultimately reverse the Russian assault.

The Ukrainians were able to fight a guerrilla-style war against advancing columns of Russian armor that were confined to the roads because of mud and trees, contributing to the buildup of vehicles that formed the infamous 40-mile convoy turned traffic jam. The onset of warmer weather will further help Russia by giving its armored formations greater freedom of movement.

"This time around the Ukrainians will need to be moving in open country where they can easily be spotted," said Jack Watling of the London-based Royal United Services Institute. "They will be in combat battles where both sides see each other, and if they are not in armored vehicles they will be vulnerable."

The logistical problems that Russia encountered in its initial push into Ukraine should be less of an issue in the east, Watling said, because Russia already occupies part of the Donbas region, which directly borders Russia, making it easier to send supplies directly from Russia.

The Russians have had time to adjust to the reality of Ukraine's ability and will to resist Russian advances, he said. "They know what they are up against, and their supply lines will be shorter", he said.

Russia can meanwhile draw on vast quantities of mechanized armor including tanks and armored vehicles, where it possesses a clear advantage over the smaller Ukrainian army, said retired Gen. Philip Breedlove, a former supreme allied commander of NATO. Russia also possesses artillery systems that have longer ranges than Ukrainian weapons, creating difficulties for Ukrainian forces when they face each other, said Breedlove, who is now with the Middle East Institute.

"That makes it really hard on the Ukrainians and imposes a shoot-and-move philosophy on the Ukrainians that they would like to be imposing on the Russians," he said.

Many observers doubt, however, that Russia's already-exhausted and depleted forces have the strength to take much more territory from Ukraine any time soon. Russia has mobilized 60,000 reservists and is assembling new battle units to replace those lost over the past few weeks, but it will take time to equip and train them, said Phillips O'Brien, professor of strategic studies at St Andrews University.

Russia committed 75 percent of its combat-ready forces to the initial invasion, and its best troops have already been fighting. They are exhausted, demoralized and depleted by equipment losses they have suffered, he said.

	<p>Russia may be able to win an advantage in some local areas, “but the army they have won’t be large enough to hold the area they take,” O’Brien said. “The army they have is too small.”</p> <p>The new environment “is not a game-changer,” said Watling. “It depends on whether the Russians are tactically up for it, and they’ve been pretty inept so far.”</p> <p>The Russians have now had a chance to adjust to the reality that the Ukrainians are likely to put up a fierce fight, and can be expected to adjust their tactics accordingly, said Mick Ryan, a recently retired Australian general who has been studying the war.</p> <p>“However, the Ukrainians have been better and faster at adapting and are so far winning this adaptation battle,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Civilians help shape narrative of war
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/04/08/ukraine-war-civilians-witness-narrative/
GIST	<p>The images stream by like a dystopian slide show: Ukrainian farmers pulling abandoned Russian tanks from black soil. Bodies and buildings shredded in airstrikes. A young woman who jokes that bunker food is the pinnacle of fine dining. The stricken faces of refugees.</p> <p>The scenes are shared online by ordinary Ukrainians who, like civilians in other conflicts of the digital age, provide visceral glimpses of life under siege, especially in areas that are inaccessible to journalists and aid workers. The first sense of the horrors in Bucha, the Kyiv suburb Russian forces withdrew from last week, came via shaky footage recorded as civilians emerged from hiding with the return of Ukrainian troops.</p> <p>Such accounts, international observers say, have helped shape the Western public’s understanding of the Russian invasion as a nightmarish war of attrition, with Moscow facing setbacks against a tough resistance. That narrative draws outrage, which in turn pressures allies to supply Ukraine with weapons that could tip the scale militarily, or at least strengthen Kyiv’s negotiating hand in peace talks.</p> <p>“We first saw it in the war in Syria, and in 2014 in Gaza, and we’re seeing it in Ukraine right now. The power dynamic has shifted,” said Olga Boichak, a lecturer and digital war scholar at the University of Sydney in Australia. “In a way, militaries have lost that dominance in framing the war, and right now the civilians are largely determining how these events will go down in history.”</p> <p>Civilians have always played a role in documenting conflicts and humanitarian crises, but the advent of social media brought unprecedented speed and reach. In the past decade, military and media analysts say, “citizen witnessing” has evolved into a powerful force because of its ability to break through public apathy, fact-check official propaganda and create a digital trove of evidence for potential war crimes investigations.</p> <p>However, the analysts added, there are also limitations, including difficulties in verifying the material and figuring out whether these slivers from the front lines are representative of a broader conflict.</p> <p>It’s easy for complexities to get lost in the emotional reactions to seeing the war through disjointed images of its human toll, said Rita Konaev of the Center for Security and Emerging Technology at Georgetown University.</p> <p>“The fog of war, the selectivity in reporting, the incentive to present certain information and hide other information — all of these factors matter, and I think that’s where the public perception kind of gets away from the details,” Konaev said.</p> <p>Still, Konaev said, even with the caveats, it’s extraordinary to watch what she calls “the people’s history” of the war being written from the ground, in real time, through thousands of social media posts.</p>

“We’ve always lived with this assumption in many previous disasters and wars that if people only knew, they would do something, they would help,” Konaev said. “Well, we can never say we didn’t know about this.”

Media scholars are monitoring Ukraine civilian witnessing as they study ethical considerations about privacy and security, as well as about how the content is displayed online and its vulnerability to government exploitation. To what extent do filters and music on social media posts distort the witnessing? How to handle instances where amateur footage potentially violates international law by, for example, filming prisoners of war or using them for propaganda purposes?

Stuart Allan, a journalism professor at Cardiff University in Wales who has [written extensively](#) about civilian contributions to crisis reporting, said the trend repositions the journalist as mediator, verifying and fleshing out raw witness accounts.

“In the absence of an overarching narrative that pulls this material together and makes sense of it, places it in context, attends to what is correct and what is misleading, you get this scattershot array of different bits and pieces,” Allan said. “It’s up to you to watch enough of this material that you get your own personal impression over a period of time.”

Civilian video and posts are also closely monitored by a [dogged community of scientific investigators](#) who comb through posts, which they regard as “OSINT,” or open-source intelligence, in search of details about munitions, Russian troop movements, and human rights abuses.

“We’re all going through the Bucha travesty now and seeing street video being correlated with overhead commercial imagery by time and by place to at least try to put the lie to the Russian narrative,” said Robert Cardillo, a former director of the U.S. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency who is now a senior executive at Planet, a commercial outfit involved in the [OSINT work on Ukraine](#).

During the Obama era, Cardillo served as a high-ranking intelligence official who for years conducted the president’s daily briefing. One August day in 2013, Cardillo recalled, he was sitting in Liberty Crossing, the U.S. intelligence compound in Virginia, when he saw a TV report showing YouTube footage of Syrian civilians convulsing in what was later confirmed as a deadly [gas attack](#) on the outskirts of Damascus.

“There I was in the center of the U.S. intelligence community and my first indication, my first warning, was that YouTube input and those Twitter feeds,” Cardillo said.

Allan, the media analyst, said the idea of [“citizen journalism”](#) was popularized in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia, where survivors documented the devastation in flooded areas through then-nascent social media sites. Allan and other analysts have since embraced the term “citizen witnessing,” which encompasses footage that comes from people simply “being in the wrong place at the right time,” as Allan puts it, as well as deliberate attempts to document hostilities.

The practice drew more attention when it became a crucial way for civilians to share their stories during the Arab Spring rebellions and spinoff wars in Libya and Syria. One Syrian activist group, [Raqqas Is Being Slaughtered Silently](#), won a 2015 press freedom award from the Committee to Protect Journalists for documenting the abuses of Islamic State militants who took over the city.

These days, citizen witnessing is again evolving with the war in Ukraine, where gritty battlefield footage competes with witness accounts that are slickly edited, complete with music and subtitles, for the TikTok treatment. Jokes and memes are sprinkled among stomach-churning images on [Telegram channels](#) that are visited by millions of people around the world looking for unfiltered updates.

Allan and other analysts say Western racial and cultural biases are a big part of why Ukrainians have drawn an outpouring of sympathy in a way that civilians in, say, Yemen or Afghanistan, have not. Another

reason for the popularity of civilian witnessing, Allan said, is the perception, especially among young audiences, that traditional news outlets too often sanitize war or obscure atrocities.

“They want to see the actual moment when a tank is destroyed by a British-made missile, and TikTok affords them that kind of insight,” Allan said. “It shows you, ‘This is what the grisly horrors of war look like up close, and isn’t it awful?’”

[TikTok’s rules](#) describe it as “a platform that celebrates creativity but not shock value or violence,” noting a ban on content deemed “gratuitously shocking, graphic, sadistic or gruesome.”

That would seemingly apply to footage showing potential war crimes such as torture or extrajudicial killings — scenes that regularly pop up on Telegram and Twitter. Humanitarian groups are increasingly vocal in their pleas for social media companies to be more transparent about how they filter images to the public, and what happens to footage deemed too graphic to post. Some activists are calling for a central “digital evidence locker” in case of future investigations.

“The last thing you want to do is traumatize people with horrific content. That’s not the way to get engagement or solidarity,” said Sam Gregory, program director at the technology-focused human rights group [Witness](#). “But, at the same time, how much content is being taken down? Is it being preserved? Will it be accessible for justice?”

Gregory cited the cautionary tale of the [Syrian Archive](#), a preservation campaign that amassed a collection of hundreds of thousands of videos from the Syrian civil war. Suddenly, in 2017, much of the collection was lost to sweeping new content moderation measures.

“They disappeared overnight because YouTube had decided they were graphic footage,” Gregory said. In Ukraine, one difference from the free-for-all battlefields of Libya or rebel-held parts of Syria is that a central government still exercises control over information.

Led by the charismatic President Volodymyr Zelensky, a master of using social media to rally support for his beleaguered nation, the government clearly understands the value of on-the-ground witnesses. Amateur footage was woven into a video montage, set to melancholy music, that Zelensky presented to Congress last month during a [virtual address](#).

At the same time, analysts say, Ukrainian authorities on the ground have warned civilians against posting images of military positions or the immediate aftermath of airstrikes in case it helps Russia improve its targeting.

“Of course, it works both ways. They’re being encouraged to photograph the Russian armed forces for intelligence purposes,” said Boichak, the analyst at the University of Sydney.

Boichak said people generally regard such efforts as a civic duty because they know that “every eyewitness testimony can potentially matter” in Ukraine’s fight for survival.

A few days after she was interviewed, Boichak’s Twitter feed provided an object lesson on the power of civilian stories to connect with faraway audiences. She tweeted a [heartbreaking post](#) describing how her grandmother in Ukraine has dementia and wakes up every day to learn anew that Russia has invaded. Each time, the post said, she starts packing to flee.

“She’s been in this never-ending loop for 41 days. Grandpa’s keeping the keys in a safe place,” Boichak wrote.

Boichak’s previous tweet, an academic argument that Russia’s targeting of Ukrainians amounts to genocide, received 10 “likes.” As for the intimate post about her grandmother’s daily struggle: More than 43,000 and counting.

HEADLINE	04/09 Fire chief killed responding to wildfire
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/09/us/fire-chief-nebraska-wildfire.html
GIST	<p>A fire chief in Nebraska was killed while responding to a wildfire that has burned nearly 30,000 acres in the south-central part of the state, destroying farms and prompting evacuations, officials said.</p> <p>The chief, Darren Krull of the Elwood Volunteer Fire Department, died on Thursday when the S.U.V. he was traveling in crashed into a water truck in “zero-visibility conditions” created by the smoke, the Nebraska State Patrol said in a statement.</p> <p>Mr. Krull, 54, was in the passenger seat of a Ford Expedition driven by Justin Norris, the Phelps County emergency manager. Mr. Norris, 40, was in stable condition at a hospital in Omaha on Friday. The water truck driver, Andries Van Aswegan, 28, was also responding to the fire and was not injured in the crash.</p> <p>The fire in Gosper and Furnas Counties was 30 percent contained on Saturday morning, according to Alyssa Sanders, coordinator for the State Emergency Response Commission.</p> <p>About 40 fire departments in the state and the Nebraska National Guard were responding to the fire, which destroyed eight houses and 48 outbuildings as it blazed across the rural area. Gov. Pete Ricketts issued an emergency declaration on Friday to make state resources available to aid in the fire response.</p> <p>The National Weather Service warned that a significant portion of Nebraska would remain at critical risk of wildfires on Saturday because of the dry conditions and high winds.</p> <p>The fire began on Thursday around noon near Elwood, in Gosper County, after strong winds blew a dead tree into a power line, according to Nebraska State Fire Marshal investigators.</p> <p>The fire spread quickly, propelled by 60 to 70 mile an hour wind gusts and incredibly dry conditions, said Aaron Mangels, a lead meteorologist at the Weather Service office in Hastings, Neb.</p> <p>Mr. Mangels said it was normal for wildfires to happen in Nebraska at this time of year, but that this one was unusually large. “Early estimates were around 30,000 acres, which is quite large for anywhere, let alone Nebraska,” Mr. Mangels said.</p> <p>The smoke and falling ash from the fire created dangerous driving conditions on Thursday and Friday morning.</p> <p>Also on Thursday, Edison, a village in Furnas County where about 150 people live, was under an evacuation order. The order was lifted on Friday afternoon.</p> <p>The Weather Service said that a fire warning was in effect for several counties in south-central Nebraska and north-central Kansas through Saturday night because of strong winds and low relative humidity. Mr. Mangels said people should avoid burning anything outdoors and be cautious while doing activities that could ignite a fire, such as agricultural work and smoking cigarettes.</p> <p>Winds had calmed to 30 m.p.h. gusts on Friday and Saturday, but they still posed a fire risk in the dry area, which has received only 20 to 40 percent of its normal amount of precipitation over the past 90 days, Mr. Mangels said.</p> <p>Nearly 60 percent of Nebraska, including Gosper and Furnas Counties, is in a severe drought according to the U.S. Drought Monitor, a collaboration of several federal agencies and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.</p> <p>Global warming increases the likelihood of drought, and the United Nations warned in February that the risk of devastating wildfires would surge as climate change further intensifies.</p>

	<p>The U.N. report, which was produced by more than 50 researchers from six continents, said that the risk of highly devastating fires could increase by up to 57 percent by the end of the century, primarily because of climate change.</p> <p>The report found that in some areas, including the Western United States, fires have become more intense over the last decade and have ravaged larger areas.</p> <p>Last month, more than 1,100 homes in the Florida Panhandle were ordered to evacuate because of fast-moving fires. From August to October, the Caldor fire in California scorched more than 200,000 acres and prompted tens of thousands of people to evacuate. Also in August, more than 6,000 homes in eastern Utah were ordered to evacuate because of a fire.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Expensive gas lasting consequences?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/10/briefing/gas-prices-explained-week-ahead.html
GIST	<p>If you were hoping for much cheaper gas anytime soon, I have some bad news: Prices probably won't drop much for at least a few months.</p> <p>The causes of more expensive gas will most likely be with us for a while. After driving U.S. prices to more than \$4 a gallon, Russia's war in Ukraine continues with no clear end in sight. Producers so far seem unwilling, or unable, to pump out enough supply to fill the gap caused by the war.</p> <p>When I asked whether any good short-term solutions exist, Tom Kloza, global head of energy analysis at the Oil Price Information Service, gave a simple answer: "No."</p> <p>For Americans, the immediate effect is that life will simply cost more. We will pay more when we fill up our gas tanks or pay energy bills in the next few weeks or months. The price of many other goods will go up, because so many things — food, iPhones, PlayStations, cars — must be transported at one point or another by a truck, a boat or a plane burning fossil fuels.</p> <p>Higher fuel prices have broader consequences, too. A push to drill more oil and natural gas, or to more aggressively pursue alternative energy sources, could affect climate change (in good or bad ways). A public angry over the cost of living could protest or vote out the politicians in power. People in the U.S. and other countries aiding Ukraine could begin to wonder whether their support is worth pricier gasoline and other goods.</p> <p>With the Covid pandemic's retreat, many of us wanted — and expected — some sense of relief after two awful years. Higher gas prices, and broader inflation trends, work against that, as if we are merely trading one crisis for another. And just as with the pandemic, no clear end is in sight.</p> <p>Producers vs. low prices</p> <p>At the onset of the pandemic, demand for fuel collapsed as people stayed home. Once much of the world reopened, demand returned.</p> <p>But supply has not kept pace, much like strained supply lines have raised food prices and impaired the flow of cars, electronics and other goods. By turning much of the world against a major oil and gas producer in Russia, the war in Ukraine only made supply problems worse.</p> <p>Some of the supply issues are by design. OPEC Plus, a cartel of oil-producing countries that includes Russia, has worked to keep prices — and therefore profits — as high as possible by limiting supply. The cartel has held fast to its approach.</p> <p>But it is not just OPEC. American oil companies have deliberately slowed production after a pair of recent fracking boom-and-bust cycles left them with a glut of supply and plummeting prices. "We're having the third boom, and these executives don't want to have the third bust," Kloza said.</p>

All of that leaves few good solutions in the short term. Even if public pressure or a strained market eventually pushes producers to drill more, new production can take months to spin up, especially given labor and supply shortages. And even if U.S. producers step up, OPEC Plus could decide to cut back — to keep prices high.

Other potential solutions that lawmakers have mentioned or enacted, like a gas tax holiday or direct cash relief, could make inflation worse by putting more money in people's pockets and keeping demand high without necessarily increasing supply. "We're not in a position to help households right now because it would cause more inflation," Jason Furman, an economist at Harvard, told me.

Meanwhile, some experts suggested that the best chance of a quick decline in gas prices is an outcome nobody wants: a new Covid variant or a recession tanking the economy and demand.

A cascading problem

Gas prices tend to get disproportionate attention compared to their actual economic impact, Furman said.

One reason for that: The cost of gas is incredibly transparent, posted on giant signs across the country. The visibility can make rising gas prices a symbol for broader inflation trends.

Rachel Ziemba, an energy expert at the Center for a New American Security, said she was worried that higher gas prices will cause social and political instability. Around the world, inflation has already prompted [protests](#) and [even riots](#). Higher gas prices in particular have historically led to [lower presidential approval ratings](#), as voters blame those in charge for inflation and bad economic conditions.

Some experts worry that higher gas prices will eventually hurt Western resolve against Russia, if Americans and Europeans start to ask whether supporting Ukraine is worth the price. Recent polls suggest the public is willing to make some sacrifices for the war effort, but polling also shows increasing discontent with inflation.

So the consequences of rising gas prices are not just to your wallet, but also possibly geopolitical.

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HEADLINE	04/09 BA.2 prompts slight rise in cases
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/09/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine#the-ba2-subvariant-prompts-a-small-increase-in-new-us-cases
GIST	<p>The daily average of new coronavirus cases in the United States ticked up 1 percent on Friday as BA.2, the highly transmissible Omicron subvariant, continued its rapid spread. It was the first uptick after weeks of recovery from the Omicron-fueled winter surge.</p> <p>The rise in average cases continued a second day. As of Saturday night, an average of roughly 30,700 cases had been reported each day in the United States over the past week, a 2 percent increase from two weeks ago, according to a New York Times tracker. That number is almost certainly an undercount, given that many asymptomatic cases go undetected and the results of the widely used home tests often do not make it into official counts.</p> <p>Caseloads have stopped falling rapidly across the United States and have started to rise in recent days in states including Alaska, Colorado, Rhode Island, Vermont and New York. Cases have doubled in Washington, D.C., and have risen about 60 percent in New York City since the last week of March. But Friday's and Saturday's numbers were the first signs of a national increase.</p> <p>Experts have been warning that another surge could be coming in the weeks since BA.2 began sweeping through Europe, where past virus waves have been harbingers of what is to come in the United States.</p>

A number of high-profile coronavirus cases have been reported in recent days, including dozens linked to a dinner last Saturday attended by many of Washington's elite. Among those who have [publicly announced](#) being infected with the virus after attending the dinner are Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo; Attorney General Merrick B. Garland; Valerie Biden Owens, the president's sister; and Representative Adam B. Schiff of California. And several Broadway shows [canceled performances](#) after their stars, including Sarah Jessica Parker and Daniel Craig, tested positive.

Nationally, the lagging indicators of hospitalizations and deaths continue to fall. New reported deaths are down 29 percent, to an average of roughly 565 deaths per day, while hospitalizations are down 20 percent, to roughly 15,100 per day.

However, five states have reported increases in hospitalizations over the last two weeks, though the raw numbers remain relatively low. Vermont's hospitalizations have risen 54 percent, to an average of 27 a day; New Hampshire, 24 percent, to 40; Connecticut, 20 percent, to 167; Maine, 12 percent, to 121; and Delaware, 10 percent, to 113.

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HEADLINE	04/09 US life expectancy continues to drop
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/09/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine#while-life-expectancy-is-rebounding-in-parts-of-the-world-white-deaths-drive-a-further-us-drop
GIST	<p>Life expectancy in the United States continued to drop in 2021, while rebounding from the pandemic in many other high-income countries, according to a new preliminary analysis that found the U.S. decline was driven largely by deaths among white Americans.</p> <p>Life expectancy is the age to which newborns could expect to live if every year of life were identical to their birth year. In 2020, that expectation dropped sharply in the United States, as it did across many nations rocked by the pandemic. In 2021, as more and more people became vaccinated, many "peer nations" began to see life expectancies rebound, according to the new study, which has not yet been peer-reviewed.</p> <p>The researchers — public health experts in Colorado, Virginia and Washington, D.C. — thought they would find a similar trajectory underway in the United States. But that wasn't so. The study estimated that U.S. life expectancy continued to drop in 2021, by a total of 2.26 years from 2019.</p> <p>The study's findings about life expectancy reflect the toll of the pandemic. Out of 3,383,729 total U.S. deaths reported by federal authorities in 2020, the first year of the pandemic, the leading causes of death remained heart disease and cancer. Covid came third, accounting for roughly 350,000 deaths, or about 10 percent. In 2021, the Covid toll was 478,286, according to data from The New York Times, a 38 percent increase.</p> <p>Other top 10 causes of U.S. deaths are injuries, stroke, chronic lower respiratory diseases, Alzheimer's, diabetes, pneumonia and kidney disease. Several are related to obesity, which is highly prevalent in the U.S. population.</p> <p>In 2020, federal data show, Black and Hispanic Americans saw the steepest declines in life expectancy. The drop was largely because of an inequitable pandemic response, the study's authors agreed. In 2021, the life expectancy for Black Americans began to rebound slightly and remained roughly stagnant for Hispanic Americans, the study found.</p> <p>The estimated overall drop in U.S. life expectancy for 2021 was driven almost entirely by increased deaths in the white population, according to Dr. Steven Woolf, a professor of family medicine and population health at Virginia Commonwealth University and one of the study's authors.</p> <p>White people account for a large share of the population in states and communities that had lax pandemic restrictions, he said, and of people who opposed vaccination and restrictive policies designed to reduce</p>

viral transmission. “We have to address the elephant in the room: polarization and partisanship in how the pandemic was handled,” Dr. Woolf said.

The peer nations the researchers cited were Austria, Belgium, Denmark, England and Wales, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Scotland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. They calculated the life expectancy figures using official counts for 2019 and 2020, and estimated for 2021 using a validated modeling method.

The approach is “reasonable,” said Prof. Noreen Goldman, a demographer at Princeton University, who was not involved in the research. However, she noted that all estimates were subject to delays in reporting and that it was important to stress that the findings were preliminary.

The U.S. life expectancy estimate for 2021 has not yet been officially reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Professor Goldman said, and would not be for another few months at least.

Because life expectancy calculations reflect the conditions in the year they are made, they would be expected to change in coming years. For instance, between 1917 and 1918, during the influenza pandemic, [U.S. life expectancy dropped precipitously, by 11.8 years](#), but quickly rebounded.

Still, Laudan Aron, a senior fellow at the Urban Institute’s Health Policy Center and one of the authors of the study, highlighted the “U.S. health disadvantage,” a term coined in a 2013 [report](#) she helped write. “Even Americans who have access to the best of what the U.S. has to offer are not doing well when it comes to health.” They are less healthy than their counterparts in Britain, she said, and structural problems involving systemic racism and inequality can lower positive outcomes for all.

Professor Goldman highlighted research showing that going back to 2000, the life expectancy for a 50-year-old woman in the richest fifth of U.S. counties was lower than what it would be if she lived in the poorest fifth of Japanese jurisdictions. And U.S. life expectancy has largely stagnated and declined since then, she said.

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HEADLINE	04/10 Ukraine war crimes justice long odds
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/10/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-crimes.html
GIST	<p>This past week, as Ukrainian forces retook the town of Bucha to find its streets littered with the bodies of bound and shot civilians, and as rockets rained on a train station packed with fleeing families, killing dozens, two words were on the lips of diplomats, world leaders and rights groups: war crimes.</p> <p>But as investigators comb Ukraine for evidence, which could be used to bring charges, an uncomfortable fact hangs over their work.</p> <p>Members of sitting governments and their militaries, no matter how horrifying the evidence against them, virtually never face international prosecution for their country’s conduct in war.</p> <p>There have been many successful war crimes trials since the foundations of such proceedings were laid at the end of World War II. But look closely and a pattern emerges that is not encouraging to hopes that the perpetrators in this war will be similarly held to account.</p> <p>In practice, justice for war crimes has been applied by conquerors, as in postwar Germany or American-occupied Iraq; by victors in civil war, as in Rwanda or Ivory Coast; or by a new government overthrowing an old one, as in Serbia or Sierra Leone.</p> <p>Champions of international law argue that the International Criminal Court and similar bodies apply rulings dispassionately and transparently. Trials typically stretch on for years and sometimes end in acquittals: It is hardly brute victor’s justice.</p>

Still, the fact remains that perpetrators almost never arrive in the dock unless they are delivered there by the victors in a war or power struggle that has deposed them.

This means that as long as a government remains in power, any war crimes charges against it, however well proven, are likely be little more than symbolic. If those in power act as if they are immune to the laws of war, it is because, in practice, they often are.

This problem has long bedeviled the world's efforts to police war, with atrocities going largely unpunished in Syria, Myanmar and many other conflicts where the accused remain in power.

Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, has expressed frustration at these limitations, telling the United Nations Security Council on Tuesday that it might as well "dissolve yourself all together."

Urging the Council to establish a tribunal for possible Russian war crimes, he said of the body's failure to hold Moscow accountable, "Do you think that the time of international law is gone?"

Maybe so, or maybe it has not yet quite arrived.

Justice for Some

The limits of international justice stretch back even to the Nuremberg tribunals, set up in Germany after World War II, and which became a basis for the international rules of war.

The tribunal was meant to establish that conduct in war can be punished as a crime, but would be done so under principles of due process and impartiality.

Ever since, global treaties and a body of international law have forbade deliberate attacks on civilians or population centers, among other acts, including torture and genocide.

Still, Nuremberg's tribunal only considered atrocities by the vanquished Nazis. Conduct by the victorious allies was left to those countries' own judicial systems, which, unsurprisingly, faulted some individual soldiers but not their governments.

This model has largely held ever since.

When Rwanda's civil war toppled its government, widely accused of genocide, it may have been the United Nations that set up a tribunal, but it was the new Rwandan government that decided who was handed over. It was mostly the defeated who stood trial.

Slobodan Milosevic, Serbia's wartime leader, faced trial in The Hague only after opposition leaders deposed and extradited him. Milosevic, off Serbian soil, would be out of the picture. And outsourcing his punishment would keep the oppositions' hands clean.

The International Criminal Court, or I.C.C., the pre-eminent body for prosecuting war crimes, has indicted about 40 people. All are from Africa. Many are leaders or rebels who lost a war or power struggle. Many, like Milosevic, were shipped over by those who'd deposed them.

While the court's rulings are considered credible, it is perceived at times as rubber-stamp for the outcome of a civil war or power struggle by helping the victors banish their opponents to a faraway prison.

The reach of such courts and tribunals is often restricted by the countries in which they were called to investigate. The courts had access to Rwanda, Bosnia and Cambodia because those countries' governments wanted them to.

In 2010, the I.C.C. opened an investigation into election violence that had killed over 1,000 people in Kenya, later naming the politician Uhuru Kenyatta and others as suspected instigators. But it dropped the case after Mr. Kenyatta became the country's president, saying it had no way to proceed.

Mr. Kenyatta, before his case was dropped, even traveled to The Hague to sit before the court investigating him, dismissing the I.C.C. as a “toy of declining imperial powers.”

Serving Justice or Power?

Efforts to overcome the hurdles of bringing war crimes charges have struggled.

Some proponents of atrocity investigations in Ukraine have argued that senior Russian leaders might be tried in absentia.

This is what happened to Sudan’s longtime leader, Omar al-Bashir, for whom the I.C.C. issued arrest warrants in 2009 and 2010 for war crimes. This effectively barred Mr. Bashir from visiting countries that had signaled they would comply with the warrant.

Still, this travel ban — like so much of international law — was ultimately subject to the whims of national governments. Dozens of countries that wished to host Mr. Bashir continued to do so freely. Those that barred his entry now had a legal justification, though many had previously placed him under sanctions that had the same effect.

The world’s major powers have consistently resisted the ability of international courts to hold them or their allies accountable, even symbolically. The United States, Russia, China and India all reject the I.C.C.’s jurisdiction.

In 2002, a few months into the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, Congress passed a law requiring that the United States cut off aid to any country that would not agree to never send an American to the court.

International justice officials have, in recent years, sought ways to investigate governments still in power.

In 2016, the I.C.C. opened an investigation into possible war crimes committed during Russia’s 2008 invasion of Georgia. Unable to gain access to territory that remains occupied by Russia, the court’s investigation has been limited. Prosecutors requested their first arrest warrants only last month, naming three individuals in Russian-held territory. None are expected to face arrest.

In 2020, the I.C.C. launched an inquiry into American conduct in Afghanistan. In response, the Trump administration imposed sanctions and travel bans against some I.C.C. officials, though the Biden administration reversed this.

Last year, the I.C.C. announced it would, after a decade of Palestinian lobbying, investigate possible war crimes in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories. Israeli officials are expected to bar the investigators from entering.

Symbolic Justice

Still, even when perpetrators are beyond reach, international courts can have a role to play.

For one, proving out crimes in absentia, under the auspices of an independent legal process, can help to establish what happened.

After a commercial airliner was shot down over separatist-held eastern Ukraine in 2014, an international investigation accused four people, three with ties to Russian intelligence, of responsibility. Some legal scholars have called for a similar approach in the current war.

Proof of responsibility, or the word of a trusted international court, can also be useful as tools of statecraft. Mr. Zelensky could use such charges to keep pressure on Western governments for military support or to lobby fence-sitters like India.

Such cases can also prove restorative for victims to see their suffering acknowledged.

Return to Top	<p>The I.C.C. investigation in Georgia collected testimony from 6,000 witnesses, most in communities that felt the world had forgotten them. It also led to the creation of a fund, financed by donations from foreign governments, that provides medical care, counseling and financial support for families displaced by the war.</p> <p>Still, with a few hundred thousand euros to spread among thousands of victims, and no power to punish Russian perpetrators, it is hardly the vision of justice conjured by references to Nuremberg, which Mr. Zelensky has urged as a model.</p> <p>“We have heard about the I.C.C.,” Tina Nebieridze, a 73-year-old survivor of Russia’s invasion of Georgia, told Justice Info, a Swiss-based development site, last year.</p> <p>“For 12 years they’ve been laughing at us, the government as well as the others in Strasbourg or The Hague,” Ms. Nebieridze said. Relocated to a crumbling apartment building far from her home, now under more than a decade of Russian occupation, she was little impressed by promises of coming assistance. “I no longer have any hope in justice.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Long-term inflationary forces building
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/inflation-hurts-better-get-used-to-it-11649507971?mod=hp_lead_pos11
GIST	<p>The runaway inflation of the past year is a radical change from the lowflation that’s dominated in the past decade, and this week’s hawkish talk from the Fed is a novelty for traders under the age of 35. But markets are priced on the basis that both high inflation and a hawkish Fed are temporary, not signs of a change in the economic regime.</p> <p>They may not be. Long-term inflationary forces are building, as even the Bank for International Settlements, central bank to the world’s central banks, warned this week. The good news is that investors who agree with me that a shift in the economic regime is under way still have time to prepare their portfolios. The bad news is that the current inflation means it’s already expensive to protect against rising prices.</p> <p>The Fed upped its hawkish rhetoric on Tuesday, and markets tumbled. The same day, San Francisco Fed President Mary Daly succinctly captured the Fed’s change of approach from worrying mainly about employment to worrying mainly about price rises: “I understand that inflation is as harmful as not having a job,” she said.</p> <p>It’s important to distinguish between the current bout of inflation, which the markets cannot ignore, and longer-run inflation. Put simply: Bond prices assume that inflation will come back to target without the Fed having to keep rates high.</p> <p>Investors aren’t exactly betting on the much-maligned “transitory” inflation that Fed Chairman Jerome Powell used to hope for, but they aren’t far off.</p> <p>Strip out the next five years, and the five years after that are priced for consumer-price inflation of 2.4% combined with a real bond yield—from Treasury inflation-protected securities—only just above zero. The Fed targets a different inflation measure, which tends to come in a bit lower than CPI, so the markets broadly expect the Fed to hit its 2% target without pushing interest rates much above inflation.</p> <p>There is good reason to be cautious about such calculations, since TIPS aren’t very liquid, the risk premium built into bonds varies and the Fed is a big buyer, potentially shifting the message from the bonds. Still, for an investor who thinks that the economy has flipped from disinflation to face long-run inflationary pressures, this is an opportunity: Either there will be more inflation than is priced in, or the Fed will have to maintain much higher rates to stop prices rising so fast.</p>

Now, it's true that the market has already moved a lot. At the start of this year, the five-year TIPS yield starting in five years had a yield of 0.47 percentage points below inflation. Now it yields 0.27 points above inflation; the Fed's hawkish talk has had an effect. Meanwhile, the bond market's inflation break-even over the five years starting in five years is very slightly up.

This isn't what pricing a new era looks like, however. Go back to 2013 and 2014—hardly ancient history—and investors thought the Fed would need higher long-term real rates than this, and still have more inflation.

During the 1980s, when Paul Volcker's Fed was desperate to avoid a repeat of the inflation of the 1970s, interest rates were on average more than 4 percentage points higher than inflation. Leave aside the fact that at the moment the Fed Funds target rate is an extraordinary 7 percentage points below inflation; markets aren't bracing for the Fed to be truly hawkish in the long run. Investors still think there's no need, since in the long run inflation pressures will abate.

This is probably a mistake. The inflationary pressures from Covid and war will surely go away eventually. But self-fulfilling consumer and business expectations of inflation are rising, and a bunch of longer-term inflationary pressures are on the way. These include the retreat of globalization, massive spending to shift away from fossil fuels, more military spending, governments willing to run loose fiscal policy, and a starting point of an overheated economy and supercheap money.

Finally, there's what to do about it if you believe inflationary pressures will last. There are plenty of bond-market trades for the financially savvy, such as bets on the break-even rate—the difference between TIPS and ordinary Treasury yields—or on higher long-term yields. These are hard to hold on to for a long time, though. And unfortunately the prices of simpler investments such as commodities, gold or stocks that might provide some protection against inflation over a decade are already up a lot, because of the current inflation.

The biggest shift in a new economic environment would be a switch in the relationship between bonds and stocks. This week, stocks fell as bond yields rose, because the rise in yields was driven by a recognition of a Fed more worried about inflation than about growth. Something similar happened last year, as inflation took off.

But it's too early to say that this is a definite change in regime. Over the past 100 days, stocks still tended to rise when yields rose, just as they have since 2000. Not since the 1980s and 1990s—the last time the Fed focused on inflation at the expense of growth—have stocks generally fallen when yields have risen.

Such a regime is tough on investors, since bonds don't cushion a portfolio the way they have for the past three decades. Rather than gaining when stocks tank, bonds would lose money too. Inflation hurts.

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HEADLINE	04/09 China accelerates nuclear buildup
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-is-accelerating-its-nuclear-buildup-over-rising-fears-of-u-s-conflict-11649509201?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	<p>China has accelerated an expansion of its nuclear arsenal because of a change in its assessment of the threat posed by the U.S., people with knowledge of the Chinese leadership's thinking say, shedding new light on a buildup that is raising tension between the two countries.</p> <p>The Chinese nuclear effort long predates Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but the U.S.'s wariness about getting directly involved in the war there has likely reinforced Beijing's decision to put greater emphasis on developing nuclear weapons as a deterrent, some of these people say. Chinese leaders see a stronger nuclear arsenal as a way to deter the U.S. from getting directly involved in a potential conflict over Taiwan.</p>

Among recent developments, work has accelerated this year on more than 100 suspected missile silos in China's remote western region that could be used to house nuclear-tipped missiles capable of reaching the U.S., according to analysts that study satellite images of the area.

American leaders have said the thinking behind China's nuclear advance is unclear. Independent security analysts who study nuclear proliferation say they are also in the dark about what is driving Beijing after exchanges between Chinese officials and analysts mostly dried up in the past few years.

The people close to the Chinese leadership said China's increased focus on nuclear weapons is also driven by fears Washington might seek to topple Beijing's Communist government following a more hawkish turn in U.S. policy toward China under the Trump and Biden administrations.

American military officials and security analysts are concerned China's nuclear acceleration could mean it would be willing to make a surprise nuclear strike. The people close to the Chinese leadership said Beijing is committed to not using nuclear weapons first.

China plans to maintain an arsenal no larger than necessary to ensure China's security interests, they said, adding that the Chinese military believes its nuclear weapons are too outdated to present an effective deterrent against a potential U.S. nuclear strike.

"China's inferior nuclear capability could only lead to growing U.S. pressure on China," one person close to the leadership said.

Nervous international reaction to Russian leader Vladimir Putin's call for his nuclear forces to be put on alert following his invasion of Ukraine has offered Chinese officials a real-world lesson about the strategic value of nuclear weapons. So did Ukraine's decision in 1994 to turn over the nuclear weapons left in the country after the breakup of the Soviet Union in return for security assurances from the U.S. and Russia.

"Ukraine lost its nuclear deterrence in the past and that's why it got into a situation like this," said a retired Chinese military officer with ties to the country's nuclear program.

The people familiar with the Chinese leadership's thinking said Beijing hasn't conveyed any adjustments to the country's nuclear policy as a result of developments in Ukraine. China's Ministry of Defense didn't respond to a request for comment.

The people have knowledge of Beijing's thinking about nuclear policy through their work with various agencies involved in security issues. None are directly involved in the setting of nuclear policy. They didn't preclude that future developments might change Beijing's approach and said other factors may also be influencing the leadership's approach to nuclear weapons.

Their observations nevertheless bring greater clarity to a shift in Beijing's thinking that has far-reaching consequences globally. Rising tension between the U.S. and China over nuclear weapons could throw the world back into a Cold War-style nuclear standoff similar to that seen in the decades following World War II between the U.S. and Soviet Union.

The risk of miscalculations this time could be higher, however, because while the U.S. and Soviet Union communicated about their nuclear weapons during arms control talks from the late 1980s, the Chinese program and Beijing's thinking on the role of nuclear weapons has been shrouded in secrecy. China has declined to engage in nuclear arms control talks with the U.S., saying Washington should first reduce its nuclear inventory.

U.S. government and private sector estimates put China's nuclear arsenal in the low hundreds of warheads, far below the roughly 4,000 warheads held by both Russia and the U.S. The Pentagon says it now expects China to have 1,000 warheads by the end of this decade.

Satellite images taken during January show the last 45 of the temporary covers over each of 120 suspected missile silos near the city of Yumen have been removed, suggesting the most sensitive work at all of the silos has been completed, said Matt Korda, a senior research associate for the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists in Washington. At two other smaller silo fields in western China, work is at earlier stages.

The silos at each of the sites are large enough for a new long-range Chinese missile known as the DF-41 that was put into service in 2020 and is capable of hitting the U.S. mainland, analysts say. Tests of missiles that are launched from aircraft and can carry nuclear warheads also give Beijing a stronger chance of being able to retaliate if it is hit first in a nuclear attack.

In public, China has played down its nuclear pursuits.

“On the assertions made by U.S. officials that China is expanding dramatically its nuclear capabilities, first, let me say that this is untrue,” Fu Cong, director general of the Foreign Ministry’s arms control department, said earlier this year. He said that China is working to ensure its nuclear deterrent meets the minimum level necessary for national defense.

Chinese leaders had seen nuclear weapons as being of limited value because they don’t offer realistic options for fighting most wars. A major shift occurred in early 2020, according to the people familiar with the leadership’s thinking, as the U.S. government hardened its stance toward Beijing in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Strong criticism of the Communist Party from senior Trump administration officials spurred a consensus among Chinese leaders that Washington was willing to take greater risks to stop China’s rise, some of the people said.

A May 2020 speech in Mandarin by former Deputy National Security Adviser Matt Pottinger was particularly alarming, they said. Speaking on the anniversary of a pivotal 1919 student protest in China, Mr. Pottinger said: “Wasn’t the goal to achieve citizen-centric government in China, and not replace one regime-centric model with another one? The world will wait for the Chinese people to furnish the answers.”

“The speech was obviously calling the Chinese to topple the Communist Party,” one person familiar with the Chinese leadership’s thinking said.

In response to a request for comment, Mr. Pottinger said that such an interpretation was “a profound admission that the Communist Party knows it has failed to deliver citizen-centric governance, and it confirms what everyone already suspected: What Beijing fears above all is its own people.”

At the same time, increased support from the U.S. for Taiwan, a democratically self-ruled island that Beijing views as a part of China and has vowed to put under its control, prompted Chinese leaders to debate the prospect that the U.S. might be willing to use nuclear weapons in a conflict over the island, according to the people close to the leadership.

There are no indications that a war over Taiwan is imminent, but leaders in both the U.S. and China believe the island is the flashpoint most likely to spark military confrontation. The U.S. maintains a policy of not saying whether it would intervene to support Taiwan, an approach intended to deter conflict. If the U.S. did intervene in a war, American bases in Japan, Guam and elsewhere in the western Pacific could become targets for the Chinese military.

Under a review of nuclear policy conducted by the Trump administration in 2018, the U.S. said it might use nuclear weapons to respond to significant nonnuclear attacks on the U.S. or its allies. President Biden is set to stick to that approach, according to U.S. officials.

Beijing believes Washington would consider attacking mainland China with nuclear weapons because the U.S. military faces challenges in defending Taiwan against the People's Liberation Army using conventional weapons, the people said.

Pointing to Ukraine, some security analysts have suggested China could use the threat of a nuclear strike to deter the U.S. not just from using its own nuclear weapons in a conflict over Taiwan, but from joining the fight with conventional military power as well.

Despite China's no-first-use pledge, U.S. military officials and analysts fear the PLA could be tempted to use its midrange missiles to wipe out U.S. military bases in the Asia-Pacific region in the event of a war.

"Large-scale conventional military involvement over Taiwan could quickly lead one side or the other to talk themselves into thinking nuclear use may improve the situation for their side," said Christopher Twomey, an associate professor of National Security Affairs at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif.

Satellite images show that work began on the Yumen silo field between March and October 2020, not long after the leadership's concerns about U.S. intentions rose.

China has declined to answer questions about whether the sites are missile silo fields, but in a meeting with senior military officers in March last year, President Xi Jinping urged them to "accelerate the construction of advanced strategic deterrent systems," state media reported, a reference to nuclear weapons.

Other recent developments suggest China is putting a greater emphasis on being able to respond to a nuclear attack in kind. Beijing is building an early-warning system to detect incoming missiles with Russian assistance, according to the Pentagon, and in February 2021, China launched a satellite that some analysts believe is the start of a space-based sensor system for missiles.

China is also developing more advanced weapons that could potentially carry nuclear warheads, including hypersonic missiles, which the U.S. has no proven defenses against.

"All of these capabilities work together to say to the U.S.: 'There is no world in which you can engage in a nuclear first strike against China and not expect nuclear retaliation back on your cities, even with your missile defenses, even with your great counterforce capabilities,'" said Caitlin Talmadge, an associate professor of security studies at Georgetown University.

Uncertainties abound despite the mounting evidence of China's nuclear buildup. U.S. intelligence estimates of China's nuclear stockpile tend to fluctuate wildly, a reflection of the challenge in collecting reliable numbers. Meanwhile, analysts caution that China is likely to load only some of its silos with missiles, and only some of those may be nuclear-tipped.

With war continuing to smolder in Ukraine, however, the calculus in Beijing is growing clearer.

"No matter how the situation develops in the future, the world will be more confrontational," said the retired Chinese military official. "Under such circumstances, China definitely needs to maintain nuclear deterrence."

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HEADLINE	04/10 Airlines staffing up; preparing for summer
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/airlines-have-been-staffing-up-hoping-for-a-smoother-summer-11649583003?mod=hp_lead_pos3
GIST	Facing a summer of packed flights , airlines are striving to avoid the blunders of a year earlier.

Carriers say they are taking seriously the lessons of last summer, when operations were strained due to booming demand. With staffing thin, many airlines were unable to recover quickly from what should have been routine disruptions such as poor weather. Travelers faced cancellations, delays and hourslong waits for customer service help by phone.

The [war in Ukraine](#), soaring jet fuel prices, [new Covid-19 variants](#) and a blistering labor market all loom large on the airline agenda for summer.

“We are very focused on maintaining our resilience,” said David Seymour, chief operating officer of [American Airlines Group](#) Inc. “We’re not letting our guard down.”

American earlier said it planned to hire about 180 pilots a month this year, and Mr. Seymour says that schedule is on track, with more than 600 hired so far through the end of March. His team has homed in on supply chains to make sure that issues like catering shortages don’t trip up flights and lead to delays.

“Two years ago, three years ago, I’m not sure it would ever surface to the COO level because you just took it for granted,” he said. “I have teams dedicated to looking at everything. I mean, from stir sticks to napkins, to pillows and blankets to headsets.”

Airlines executives say bookings exceed expectations, despite soaring fuel costs that are pushing ticket prices higher. Summer schedules haven’t been completed and are still fluctuating, but U.S. airlines currently plan to fly about 16% more seats than last summer, according to data from Cirium.

The increase in flying this summer will be less dramatic than last year, when airlines rapidly added flights to pounce on renewed appetite for travel as vaccines were distributed and Covid-19 case numbers waned. U.S. airlines increased their flight numbers by 60% in the first six months of 2021, according to schedule data from Cirium. This year, the increase is more muted: Airlines’ July schedules are only about 17% bigger than January’s.

Higher fuel costs, aircraft delivery delays, and staffing shortfalls have restrained airlines’ ability to add as many flights as they would like, executives have said.

Still, “The operations staffing will be on a razor’s edge,” said Tim Donohue, co-founder of Aerology, a startup that works to predict flight disruptions. “The razor’s edge barely works when things go as scheduled.”

Covid-19 still looms large. At the start of the year airlines canceled thousands of flights as Omicron infections ripped through their workforces. Airlines in the U.K. have been hit by a similar wave of infections this month, forcing flight cancellations. That could happen again if U.S. case rates surge once more.

Carriers say they [have spent months hiring staff](#), including pilots, flight attendants, gate agents, ramp workers and customer-service representatives.

Spring break travel has provided the first [tests of the industry’s readiness](#), and there have been some signs of strain.

Severe storms that lingered over Florida last Saturday and prompted airspace restrictions also [upended airline operations](#). While most airlines were back on schedule within a few days, some struggled to get on track: [Spirit Airlines](#) Inc. canceled 40% of flights last Sunday and continued scrubbing flights into the week. Unions said flight attendants faced hourslong waits to find transportation and hotels.

Some flight attendants were forced to sleep in airports, unions that represent flight attendants at American and Southwest said.

In a letter to top Southwest executives, Lyn Montgomery, president of the union that represents Southwest's flight attendants, wrote this past week: "The current work environment is not just unstable but chaotic."

A Southwest spokeswoman said the snafu was due to fully booked hotels in Florida, where crews were stuck, and that it is working to improve contingency planning.

An American spokeswoman said the airline was aware of the issue and has been working to improve.

In an effort to make sure it has enough flight attendants working, [JetBlue Airways](#) Corp. is offering a \$1,000 bonus to flight attendants who don't call out of work through May 31 and an extra \$100 per trip for flight attendants who pick up open trips on days off, according to a memo to crew.

Southwest raised starting wages to at least \$17 an hour and no longer requires that most airport workers have a high-school diploma. Some 15% to 20% of new hires don't show up on their first day for some roles, said Greg Muccio, the airline's senior director of talent acquisition. "We were sort of shocked by it. We've just had to adjust," he said.

The airline says it expects to be able to hire sufficient workers [to fly its June schedule](#).

Pilots at [Alaska Air Group](#) Inc., [Delta Air Lines](#) Inc., and American have all picketed in recent weeks, complaining that the airlines have built schedules with little margin for error, leaving pilots overworked and fatigued.

"We continuously evaluate our staffing models and plan ahead so that we can recover quickly when unforeseen circumstances arise," a Delta spokesman said.

Competition for pilots among airlines has been fierce. The Southwest Airlines Pilots Association, the union that represents Southwest's pilots, said in some recent new-hire classes, roughly 10% of the pilots have quit. In one class, 27% left. The union that represents pilots at Alaska Air said it has seen record levels of attrition.

Alaska blamed a staffing shortage for cancellations of roughly 10% of its flights last weekend.

The airline said Thursday that it would trim flying by about 2% through the end of June. Alaska said it had 63 fewer pilots ready to fly in April than it had planned for in January when it set its schedule.

Pilot training has also become a bottleneck as airlines don't always have enough flight instructors or simulators to handle the massive influx. Southwest has had to trim back its plans for hiring first officers as it works to recruit more flight instructors. Alaska said it has dedicated a team to make sure it is keeping up with pilot training and not letting the schedule get out of sync with the number of pilots it has.

"The choke point has been in getting everyone trained as we've ramped the airline back up and returned aircraft to service throughout the pandemic," Spirit Chief Executive Ted Christie said at an industry gathering. "We're getting there."

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HEADLINE	04/09 Ukraine urges: flee ahead assault
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/zelensky-calls-russian-strike-on-ukrainian-train-station-a-war-crime-11649502528?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	KYIV, Ukraine—Heavier shelling in a front-line Ukrainian region prompted officials to urge remaining civilians to evacuate Saturday as Russia stepped up attacks in Ukraine's east ahead of an expected offensive .

Russia's military was amassing forces and shelling was increasing in the east, making it more urgent for civilians in the area to leave, Serhiy Haidai, governor of the eastern Luhansk region, told Ukrainian public television.

The assault comes after a Russian missile strike Friday on [the train station in Kramatorsk](#), to the west. The station was thronged with 4,000 Ukrainians heeding official calls to flee ahead of what both sides say is the next phase of [the six-week-old conflict](#): a fresh Russian offensive [to expand its hold on Ukraine's east](#).

At least [52 people were killed](#) and more than 100 were injured in the station attack, with five children among the dead and another 16 wounded as of late Friday, according to the head of the administration in the eastern region of Donetsk, where Kramatorsk is located.

Russia denied the strike but said its forces were targeting train stations to prevent Ukraine's military from moving weapons and other supplies into the area, known as Donbas, which includes Donetsk and the neighboring Luhansk region. Ukrainian officials have accused Russia of thwarting evacuation attempts [in the city of Mariupol](#) and other parts of the country by mounting heavy artillery barrages.

Mr. Haidai, the Luhansk governor, said evacuations were being attempted via five corridors that were coming under attack.

"Every evacuation day is like the last," Mr. Haidai said on social media. "The Russians do not allow for the protection of the lives of the inhabitants of the Luhansk region. Every day we take people out under heavy fire."

Both sides are gearing up for a full-scale Russian assault in Donbas in the coming days, with Ukraine trying to remove civilians and send in military supplies while Russia repositions forces withdrawn from around Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, in the north where they [encountered stiff resistance](#).

Kyrylo Budanov, Ukraine's head of military intelligence, said in an interview on CNN that the Russian forces that pulled out of northern Ukraine were regrouping across the border around the Russian city of Belgorod, where they are picking up additional troops to compensate for their losses.

Mr. Budanov said the Kremlin's renewed assault would attempt to take the northern city of Kharkiv and "try to finish off the city of Mariupol" in the south before advancing toward Kyiv.

Mr. Haidai said he expects the new Russian offensive to begin soon so that Moscow's army could deliver "some kind of victory" ahead of May 9 commemorations of victory in World War II.

Friday's train station strike on fleeing civilians came on the heels of allegations that Russian troops in their occupation of areas around Kyiv killed large numbers of civilians. Those alleged actions have further solidified Western support for Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, in a televised address early Saturday, called the train-station strike the "latest war crime of Russia, for which everyone involved will be held accountable." President Biden, U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson and others condemned the attack.

Mr. Johnson on Saturday became the latest European leader to travel to Kyiv to show support for Mr. Zelensky's government. Mr. Johnson laid out a new package of military and other assistance "to support Ukraine in this crucial phase while Russia's illegal assault continues," his office said.

Included in the new aid, Mr. Johnson's office said, are 120 armored vehicles and new antiship missile systems, which will come in addition to a package announced Friday of Starstreak anti-aircraft missiles, 800 antitank missiles and high-tech munitions that loiter above targets for precision strikes.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who went to Kyiv on Friday, said after her visit that the European Union is proposing 500 million euros, equivalent to \$544 million, in new support for Ukraine's military, on top of 1 billion euros previously allocated for weapons.

"This war will be won on the battlefield," EU Foreign-Policy Chief Josep Borrell, who accompanied Ms. von der Leyen, tweeted on Saturday.

As part of what he called his "to do list," Mr. Borrell said that he planned to meet Sunday with the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, who is investigating suspected war crimes in Ukraine.

Ukrainian authorities on Saturday continued collecting the dead and cleaning up in areas around Kyiv that had been occupied by Russian forces until their retreat in the final days of March.

In the district of Makariv to the west of Kyiv, police traveled around villages picking up civilians who had been shot or died from shrapnel wounds or other causes. Officials said they had collected more than 100.

In Bucha, the Kyiv suburb where Russian forces left behind the bodies of several hundreds of civilians, people collected wreckage, piling it high on sidewalks and streets for removal. Cranes and dump trucks removing blackened and rusted Russian armored vehicles from a column the Ukrainian military had destroyed more than a month ago.

Government investigators questioned people about what they had seen during the occupation. Units with the town's territorial defense searched homes whose residents they suspected of looting. The sounds of controlled explosions rocked Bucha now and then, as bomb technicians eliminated booby traps and unexploded ordnance.

Russia's repositioning of its forces from northern Ukraine to the east provides a window for the West to supply Ukraine with more armaments, said Mr. Budanov, the military-intelligence chief.

"We are getting more supplies. These supplies are not enough," Mr. Budanov told CNN. His list of needs includes heavy artillery, air-defense and missile systems, as well as combat planes, the latter of which the U.S. has been reluctant to provide out of concern it would bring it into direct conflict with Russia.

Ahead of the expected offensive, Ukraine's east—a site of persistent, mostly low-boil fighting since Russian-controlled separatists took over parts of the area in 2014—is becoming a war zone.

Ukrainian officials said Saturday that their forces held firm in the face of artillery barrages, some of which struck civilian buildings, and tank assaults in the past 24 hours.

Ukraine's air-force command said that it intercepted a Russian drone, a cruise missile and a helicopter, and that the military in the eastern part of the country had downed a Russian helicopter.

Mr. Haidai, the Luhansk governor, said Russian forces had seized parts of the towns of Rubizhne and Popasna and were trying to push Ukrainian defenders out. In an interview with Ukrainska Pravda, a Ukrainian news portal, Mr. Haidai said that Russia had been hammering Popasna, a town of some 20,000, for more than a month, and that authorities were unable to organize the evacuation of civilians because of the intensity of strikes.

"They are destroying everything," he said.

Mr. Haidai told public television that around 30% of residents remained in cities in the region, and he urged them to leave if possible.

Ukraine's state railway company said 11 evacuation trains would depart Saturday from two cities in the country's east to cities in the west.

	<p>The Black sea port city of Odessa, which has been repeatedly hit by missiles during the conflict, ordered a curfew from Saturday night to Monday morning over what the local military administration said is the danger of a missile strike.</p> <p>The administration, in a Facebook post, specified Sunday as the timing for the possible attack. It didn't provide further explanation but cited Friday's missile attack on the Kramatorsk train station.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Sri Lanka on brink financial disaster
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/09/sri-lanka-financial-crisis-protesters-call-for-gotabaya-rajapaksa-resignation-please
GIST	<p>While thousands of angry cries and anti-government slogans filled the streets of the Sri Lankan city Colombo on Saturday, Chanda Upul stood quietly nearby, desperately pushing his wares of soft drinks and bottled water on protesters. But in his heart he was chanting along with them.</p> <p>Sri Lanka has descended into its worst financial crisis since independence, with food, fuel, medicine and electricity becoming increasingly scarce, and calls for the president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa – frequently referred to as Gota – to step down. And 50-year-old Upul, who lives in a poor northern suburb of the city, is among those who have been pushed to the brink of survival.</p> <p>As petrol became scarce and expensive, Upul was no longer able to afford repayments on his rented rickshaw and lost his only means of income. Now he and his four children survive on rice and water. Vegetables and milk powder are just too expensive these days.</p> <p>“The only thing we can do now is drink poison, we are finished,” said Upul. “I voted for Gota thinking he was a lion, now I can see that he is worse than a dog. I love my country but don't know if there will be a country left for my children.”</p> <p>The impacts of Sri Lanka's financial meltdown have barely left a corner of the country unscathed. There are the power cuts darkening homes and shop fronts for up to eight hours daily and forcing people to cook on scavenged wood while miles-long queues form outside petrol stations. School exams and newspapers have had to be cancelled because the government and media houses can't afford the paper to print them on. Doctors have declared a medical crisis as pharmacies and hospitals are empty of crucial drugs, and warnings have been issued that starvation could be imminent for the country's 22 million residents as food supplies dwindle. In Colombo, police stand at road junctions because the traffic lights have been turned off.</p> <p>But nowhere can the seismic shift in the country be felt more than out on the streets. In recent weeks, protests unlike anything seen in Sri Lanka's history have taken place across the country, driven not by an organised movement but fuelled instead by a collective rage at the politicians they blame for driving their country into the ground, leading many to describe it as “Sri Lanka's Arab spring”.</p> <p>Swathes of those hitting the streets are Sri Lanka's younger generation, furious at what they see as their own futures being set alight by the divisions and incompetencies of the older generation. Vasi Samudra Devi, a 26-year-old artist, said she was “incredibly afraid for what might happen”.</p> <p>“It's everyone's duty to be protesting, the situation here is so bleak for young people,” said Devi. “These corrupt politicians have stolen our money and destroyed our future. We deserve better than this.”</p> <p>Jehan Perera, executive director of the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, described the scale and scope of the protests as “absolutely unprecedented”.</p> <p>“The way people from all communities are coming out on to the streets, I have never seen it before,” he said. “And it's happening organically, there's no mastermind or political party behind all of this. It's very</p>

youth-driven but you've got middle-class people, elderly people, wealthy businessmen, families, people who have never protested before.

"The anger and enthusiasm isn't dying down," Perera added. "These protests are not going to end any time soon."

The wrath of the protesters across the country has mainly been targeted at Rajapaksa, the country's strongman president who was elected in 2019 on the back of a fierce nationalist agenda. Part of Sri Lanka's most powerful family, and in charge of the military during the final years of the civil war – in which he is accused of committing war crimes – he was long the most feared man in national politics.

In the past two years, he amended the constitution to strengthen his own executive powers and five of his family members took up senior government posts, including his brother Mahinda, who is prime minister.

But his government's devastating economic decisions since taking power – including scrapping austerity measures when he came into power, cutting taxes to just 8% of GDP, printing vast amounts of money pushing up inflation, refusing to restructure the country's mounting foreign debt and using up all the foreign reserves – have now made him the most derided man in Sri Lankan politics. The rallying cry of the protests has been "Gota go home", a reference to his dual US citizenship.

His entire cabinet resigned last week and more than 40 politicians defected from his ruling coalition to become independent, with one warning that "if we don't act now, there will be a river of blood in the country". But Rajapaksa has insisted he has no intention of resigning.

"It's evident he can't run a government," said Thiyagaraja Waradas, 35, a senior lecturer at the University of Colombo attending a rally organised by the LGBT community. "The president must go: it's the only way."

Waradas gestured out at the crowds, where national flags mingled with rainbow LGBT banners and trade union placards, to demonstrate the diversity and non-partisan nature of the demonstrations, highly unusual in a country still divided heavily down ethnic lines. Nearby, members of the Buddhist clergy stood in their orange robes solemnly calling for political accountability, and down the road, hundreds of workers from the IT sector could be heard shouting "error 404: democracy not found". Later that day, the LGBT protest would merge with a Muslim-led rally where rainbow flags flew as Muslim families broke their Ramadan fast and handed out samosas.

"The nature of this crisis is that nobody is left unaffected," said Waradas. "Most of my friends struggle to pay rent, they have lost jobs, they don't have food or medicines. They have almost left our people to die."

Charu, a 24-year-old student, also voiced his anger at the Rajapaksa dynasty, who have ruled Sri Lanka on and off since 2002. "This is all the fault of the Rajapaksas, with their poisonous nationalism and bad governance," he said. "People are starving, we are in terrible debt because of him and we can't even turn the lights on. But he is not taking responsibility." Like others around him, Charu shook his head woefully when speaking of the future. "I have no hope," he said.

Many fear Sri Lanka is facing political deadlock as, under its system, Rajapaksa cannot be voted out by parliament. However, the main opposition party is preparing a no-confidence motion against his party in parliament. The opposition's aim is that, with the president in a weakened position, he will either step down or accept legislation that will reduce his powers, enabling them to form a new government out of his grasp.

"Gotabaya has lost the confidence and legitimacy of the people, it's impossible for him to continue," said Shanakiyan Rasamanickam, of the Tamil National Alliance party, which forms part of the opposition.

	<p>On Saturday, thousands turned out at one of the biggest protests in Colombo so far, lining the pavements along the boardwalk where many luxury developments, now considered unaffordable monuments to hubris, have been built over the past few years.</p> <p>Friends Nelum Leanage, 69, and Manel Rajakaruna, 72, stood among the crowds wrapped in Sri Lanka flags. “We want the president to return all the money he has robbed from us, then resign from politics and get out of this country,” said Leanage.</p> <p>“He doesn’t belong here, yet he has stolen billions from us, he has a luxury life while we have nothing. Unlike him, with his US passport, we don’t have another country to go to.”</p> <p>Rajakaruna nodded her head vigorously in agreement. “Even during 26 years of war things never got this bad,” she said. “This is the worst I have ever seen the country.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Millions of bird deaths in avian flu outbreak
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/09/bird-flu-millions-birds-avian-influenza
GIST	<p>Millions of birds have died in the US in recent weeks, because of a contagious strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza, popularly known as bird flu.</p> <p>The bird flu has also led zoos across the US to temporarily close aviary exhibits and move birds away from the public. At zoos from Colorado to Maryland, species ranging from ostriches to penguins have been moved indoors.</p> <p>The virus poses a low risk to humans, but the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has estimated that nearly 24m poultry birds, mostly chickens and turkeys, have died of the flu since February, when a flock of turkeys in Indiana were confirmed to have the virus. The bird flu has been seen in at least 24 states.</p> <p>Last seen in the US in 2015, bird flu arrives through wild migratory birds, the season for which lasts from March to May. Wild birds, including waterfowl like ducks and geese, tend to not get sick when infected. Farmed chickens and turkeys are highly susceptible.</p> <p>As a result, poultry meat and eggs are in tighter supply. In Iowa, the state that produces the most eggs, more than 11m of 56m egg-laying hens have died.</p> <p>“As long as the [wild bird] migration patterns continue, there is a risk for disease to continue to be introduced to our domestic population,” Chloe Carson, the communications director of the Iowa agriculture department, told CNN.</p> <p>Egg prices have risen. The average price of a dozen eggs has reached \$2.60, compared to around \$1.40 at the same time last year, according to the USDA.</p> <p>The agriculture secretary, Tom Vilsack, told reporters on Tuesday that because poultry facilities developed stricter containment measures after the last bird flu outbreak in 2015, they are better equipped to prevent the virus spreading.</p> <p>“The nature of the outbreaks, the size of the operations that have been impacted, the number of states that are dealing with backyard operations as opposed to commercial-sized operations, would strongly suggest that when this is all said and done, it’s going to be significantly less than what we experienced in 2014-15,” Vilsack said.</p> <p>Zoos have also taken precautionary measures. In a statement, the Maryland zoo said: “We have moved birds that are more likely to come in contact with migrating waterfowl.</p>

	<p>“These birds have been moved to indoor housing. Because the disease can be tracked on shoes, zoo aviaries have been closed and indoor contact with birds is limited to a small number of staff.”</p> <p>While previous bird flu viruses have affected humans, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has noted that this current virus has so far posed a low risk to the general public’s health.</p> <p>“Some people may have job-related or recreational exposures to birds that put them at higher risk of infection,” the CDC said. “The CDC is watching this situation closely and taking routine preparedness and prevention measures in case this virus changes to pose a greater human health risk.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Pakistan parliament ousts prime minister
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/09/pakistan-on-brink-of-crisis-as-imran-khan-blocks-no-confidence-vote
GIST	<p>Pakistan’s prime minister, Imran Khan, has lost a no-confidence vote in parliament after a dramatic week in which he violated the constitution in an attempt to stop the move going ahead.</p> <p>Khan, the former premier cricketer turned pious Islamist politician, has been fighting for his political life for weeks, after losing his parliamentary majority.</p> <p>On Thursday, he was delivered a blow after Pakistan’s supreme court found he had broken the law by dissolving parliament in an attempt to prevent a no-confidence vote he was expected to lose from going ahead last week.</p> <p>On the court’s instructions, the vote finally took place on late Saturday night, though not before Khan’s party spent a 14 tumultuous hours trying to delay and block it in the national assembly.</p> <p>The parliament’s lower house will meet on Monday to vote for a new prime minister, it was announced later on Saturday.</p> <p>The opposition had accused Khan of trying to hold the constitution and government “hostage” and of treason after his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, attempted various means, including filibustering and legal petitions, to try to stop the vote.</p> <p>The opposition stated that Khan was refusing to let the vote go ahead unless he could secure a guarantee that neither he nor his cabinet ministers would face criminal cases once they stepped down. During his time in power, Khan had jailed several opposition party figures.</p> <p>As Khan took meetings with ministers and senior military figures on Saturday, many feared that he would try to get Pakistan’s powerful army to step in and declare martial law rather than hand over power to the opposition, returning Pakistan to its past dark days of military interventions in times of political instability. Fears of unrest swirled and security was beefed up around the prime minister’s residence.</p> <p>As concerns over Khan violating the supreme court ruling mounted, the chief justice took the unprecedented step of asking the supreme court to be ready to open its doors at midnight, should the vote not happen. The Islamabad high court also prepared itself to hear a late-night contempt of court case.</p> <p>With just 10 minutes to go before midnight, the legal deadline for the vote, the house speaker Asad Qaiser, an ally of Khan whose role it was to put forward the no-confidence vote in parliament, resigned from his post, saying he could not take part in a foreign conspiracy to oust the PM.</p> <p>Instead, the speaker role was passed to another MP and, in the final moments of Saturday, after reported pressure from the military on Khan to either resign or face the vote of no confidence, Khan finally agreed to have his premiership put to parliament, though left the parliament chamber as the vote took place.</p>

As expected, without a majority, he lost the no-confidence vote by 174 votes, thereby removing him from power over a year before his term officially ended and making him the first Pakistan prime minister to be ousted on a no-confidence vote. Fawad Hussain, Khan's minister for information, called it a "sad day for Pakistan. The return of looters and a good man sent home."

Khan's loss leads the way for a new opposition coalition government, with the leader of the opposition, Shahbaz Sharif, the brother of the jailed former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, as interim prime minister. The opposition has stated its intention to hold elections in the next few months, though they are likely to be October at the earliest.

Sharif, who will be sworn in as the next prime minister in coming days, told the Guardian that the opposition had no intention of taking "revenge" on Khan and "no intention to pursue the politics of hate and divisiveness. Pakistan needs healing and should look forward."

Sharif said they would prioritise electoral reform, with a view to holding a general election "in due course"

"The country is in all sorts of mess, thanks to the epic mismanagement of the Imran Khan government," he said. "From paralysed bureaucracy to the foreign policy challenges to the broken economy, chaos is reigning supreme."

Last week's no-confidence vote was tabled by the opposition amid an economic crisis that has pummelled Khan's popularity.

Khan shocked the opposition by instructing the deputy speaker of the house, a close ally, to throw out the vote on the basis of his allegations that it was the result of a "foreign conspiracy" to unseat him.

Khan then instructed the president, another ally, to dissolve parliament and announced fresh elections would happen within three months. He defended the move as an attempt to protect Pakistan from a western- and specifically US-led conspiracy to interfere in its affairs.

The opposition described it as a "civilian coup" and a treasonous attempt by Khan to cling to power despite losing his majority. They appealed to the supreme court, who overturned Khan's decision.

Despite many suggesting he might resign rather than face the humiliation of a defeat in parliament, in a late night address to the country, Khan made it clear he had no intention of stepping aside voluntarily.

He called for his supporters to take to the streets in mass protest and said he would not accept any "imported" government, a veiled reference to his previous allegations that the political opposition had conspired with western powers to topple him, a charge they deny.

"What is happening with our democracy is catastrophic," Khan said in his speech. Khan, once a national cricketing hero and international playboy, was elected in 2018 as the "modern" face of Pakistan, who had the backing of the military and promised economic prosperity and an end to corruption.

But his time in office has been blighted by economic crisis, including record inflation . He had also been seen to pander to militant Islamic groups, and during his time in office religious violence and public lynchings of those accused of blasphemy were on the rise.

Nonetheless Khan still commands fierce among his supporters and is expected to contest the next elections, though this time without the tacit backing of the military establishment.

In a Twitter post after the supreme court ruling, Khan wrote: "My message to our nation is I have always and will continue to fight for Pak till the last ball."

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SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/10/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-46-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A recently discovered grave holding the remains of dozens of Ukrainian civilians has been found in Buzova, a liberated village near the capital, Kyiv, local officials said. • Residents in besieged Luhansk in eastern Ukraine will be able to evacuate the area today with nine trains ready for civilians to flee, the governor has said. • A school and several apartment buildings were hit by shelling in the Luhansk and Dnipro areas early on Sunday morning, wounding one person and causing a fire, officials said. • Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has warned his country "does not have time to wait", while pushing for an oil embargo on Russia in his latest national address. "Oil is one of the two sources of Russian self-confidence, their sense of impunity," he said. • Zelenskiy said his country was ready for a tough battle with Russian forces amassing in the east of the country. "This will be a hard battle; we believe in this fight and our victory. We are ready to simultaneously fight and look for diplomatic ways to put an end to this war." • The British prime minister, Boris Johnson, pledged a major new infusion of British arms and financial aid during a surprise trip to Kyiv on Saturday. Johnson said the UK and its partners and allies would provide support so that "Ukraine will never be invaded again". The UK confirmed it would send 120 armoured vehicles and new anti-ship missile systems. • Johnson praised Zelenskiy's "resolute leadership" and "invincible heroism". "[Vladimir] Putin's monstrous aims are being thwarted," Johnson said. The reputations of the Russian president and his government had been "permanently polluted" by war crimes against civilians in Ukraine, he added. • Russia's withdrawal from northern Ukraine has left evidence of "disproportionate targeting" of civilians, mass graves and the use of hostages as human shields, according to the latest British intelligence report. The report also claimed Russian forces continued to use improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to inflict casualties, lower Ukrainian morale and restrict freedom of movement. • In response to mounting losses, the Russian armed forces were seeking to bolster troop numbers with personnel discharged from military service since 2012, the UK's Ministry of Defence said. • The Ukrainian military said its soldiers thwarted eight Russian attacks in Donetsk and Luhansk, according to its latest operational report as of 6am on Sunday. Officials claim Russian forces are attempting to break through the Ukrainian defences in Izum in Kharkiv, east Ukraine, by relocating additional units to the area. • Satellite images released by the US private space technology company Maxar Technologies show a 13km-long military convoy moving south through the eastern Ukraine town of Velkyi Burluk, east of Kharkiv, on 8 April. • Unconfirmed reports allege that another top Russian general has died in battle in Ukraine. Col Alexander Beshpalov, the commander of the 59th Guards Tank Regiment, was reportedly killed and a funeral was held on Friday in the Russian city of Ozersk, according to local media reports. • Nato is working on plans for a permanent military presence on its border in an effort to battle future Russian aggression, the Telegraph is reporting, citing the alliance's secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg.
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HEADLINE	04/09 UK PM pledge, surprise visit to Kyiv
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/09/boris-johnson-pledges-to-send-more-arms-during-surprise-visit-to-kyiv
GIST	<p>Boris Johnson made a surprise trip to Kyiv yesterday to meet the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, pledging a major new infusion of British arms and financial aid to help counter the expected deadly new phase in Russia's military offensive.</p> <p>After the meeting, the prime minister said: "Ukraine has defied the odds and pushed back Russian forces from the gates of Kyiv, achieving the greatest feat of arms of the 21st century."</p>

“It is because of president Zelenskiy’s resolute leadership and the invincible heroism and courage of the Ukrainian people that Putin’s monstrous aims are being thwarted. I made clear today that the United Kingdom stands unwaveringly with them in this ongoing fight, and we are in it for the long run.

“We are stepping up our own military and economic support and convening a global alliance to bring this tragedy to an end, and ensure Ukraine survives and thrives as a free and sovereign nation.”

Last night No 10 said Britain would send 120 armoured vehicles and new anti-ship missile systems to Ukraine. The missiles can do serious damage to Russian warships and could be used to tackle the Russian navy siege of Black Sea ports. The UK pledged £100m in military assistance last week, including another 800 anti-tank missiles, more anti-aircraft weapons, “suicide drones”, which hover over the battlefield before attacking a target, and helmets, body armour and night-vision goggles.

Johnson has been praised by Zelenskiy, who contrasts the fulfilment of a promise to deliver vital anti-tank weapons to its army with the more timid responses from other Nato member countries such as Germany.

The security situation in Ukraine’s capital has stabilised since Russia withdrew from its positions around the city on 29 March to regroup its forces and consolidate territorial gains in Ukraine’s south and east.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen also visited Ukraine’s capital on Friday, as well as the nearby town of Bucha, where overwhelming evidence suggests that civilians were raped and murdered by Russian troops.

Johnson’s visit comes a day after Zelenskiy called on western allies to provide more military aid and step up sanctions on Russia in the wake of a missile attack on a train station in the eastern city of Kramatorsk that killed 52 people, including five children.

Russia’s defence ministry has denied responsibility for the strike, but western intelligence officials believe a Russian short-range ballistic missile was fired indiscriminately towards the town centre. At the time of the attack the station was packed with civilians who had been ordered by the Ukrainian government to evacuate the town in the face of the Russian advance from the south-east.

“I have already left Kramatorsk, because when a missile hit a school very close to my house, we were very scared,” said Sofiya Ruban, 17, who fled to the Kyiv area with her family.

“When we heard about yesterday’s airstrikes at the railway station we were shocked and very saddened.”

Russian shelling and missile attacks have intensified in several areas across eastern Ukraine as Moscow moves its “special military operation” away from toppling the government to focus on building a corridor connecting the Russian-occupied region of Crimea with Luhansk and Donetsk – also de-facto controlled by Moscow – with the Russian mainland.

The besieged city of Mariupol, together with the southern city of Mykolaiv, which has faced significant shelling, are major Kremlin targets, the UK Ministry of Defence has said.

With trains not running out of Kramatorsk on Saturday, panicked residents boarded buses or looked for other ways to get out, fearing the kind of unrelenting assaults and occupations by Russian invaders that delivered food shortages, demolished buildings and death to other cities in Ukraine.

Zelenskiy called the station attack the latest example of war crimes by Russian forces and said it should motivate the west to do more to help his country defend itself.

“All world efforts will be directed to establish every minute of who did what, who gave what orders, where the missile came from, who transported it, who gave the command and how this strike was agreed,” Zelenskiy said in his nightly video address.

	<p>In response to the shelling of Kramatorsk, a curfew in the southern port city of Odesa went into effect on Saturday evening until Monday evening.</p> <p>Ten humanitarian corridors to evacuate people from embattled areas across the country had been agreed on Saturday, Ukraine's deputy prime minister Iryna Vereshchuk said, but by nightfall it was unclear whether civilians had been able to make it to Ukrainian-controlled territory.</p> <p>Several attempts to evacuate 150,000 people still in Mariupol, which has been under constant fire since 24 February, and bring in vital provisions such as food and medicine, have ended in failure after Russian shelling of safe routes. Two UN agencies also called for urgent action to help an estimated 1,000 seafarers stranded in Ukrainian ports and waters with dwindling supplies.</p> <p>The US-based Institute for the Study of War said that Ukrainian forces retain control of defensive positions in eastern and south-western Mariupol, and Russian forces are continuing to attempt to redeploy units in eastern Ukraine. Russian forces are "unlikely to enable a Russian breakthrough and face poor morale", ISW said.</p> <p>Last week, Dmitry Peskov, a Kremlin spokesperson, said the country had "significant losses of troops and it's a huge tragedy for us".</p> <p>The conflict may be in danger of becoming a gruelling war of attrition. The Pentagon estimates that Russia's combat power is between 80% and 85% of pre-invasion levels.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Forensic teams uncover gruesome secrets
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/09/with-bloodied-gloves-forensic-teams-uncover-gruesome-secrets-of-bucha-in-ukraine
GIST	<p>Sometimes the dead have more to say than the living. Those lying beneath the soft, yellow earth in the grounds of the church of Andrew the Apostle, in the Ukrainian town of Bucha, have many terrible stories to tell.</p> <p>In a deep mass grave, a forearm and hand, the fingertips turning black, lay under a foot at a sickening angle; another man's arm looked like it was clawing its way out of the disturbed soil in an attempt to escape his fate.</p> <p>On Friday morning a team of forensic investigators from Kyiv arrived at the site to begin documenting the terror inflicted on civilians by Russian troops during Moscow's six-week-old invasion. They strapped a door to a municipal digger to create a makeshift gurney, and got to work.</p> <p>All of the people they uncovered had died violently. One man was missing a large chunk of his skull; another body was so badly burned only his head and half of his torso remained, the whites of his eyes subsumed by charred flesh. One person appeared to have been beheaded.</p> <p>As each new cadaver was laid in front of him, the lead investigator knelt over it and softly murmured an inventory while a colleague wrote it down: leather jacket, mobile phone, no ID. He checked inside decaying mouths, the range of motion of broken limbs, and documented burns, bullet wounds and injuries caused by shrapnel, before volunteers from the town helped put each corpse into a fresh body bag.</p> <p>Their pink and blue plastic gloves were soon slick with blood. Between bodies, the workers plunged their hands into the metre-high pile of dirt taken out of the grave so far, rubbing clumps of it between their palms to restore their grip.</p> <p>Heavy rain stopped work. At the end of the day, the team had exhumed 18 corpses. But many more missing people of Bucha are waiting to be found.</p>

A wealthy northwest Kyiv commuter town before the conflict began, the name of Bucha is now synonymous with Russian war crimes. After a month of fighting, its soldiers embrangled at positions about 40km northeast and northwest of the capital and unable to advance, Bucha was one of the first places that Moscow pulled back from to reconcentrate its forces on Ukraine's east. The scale of the violence against civilians which took place here – murders, rapes, torture, looting – is horrifying.

“The morgue had no electricity and it quickly became full. There were still so many bodies on the streets,” said Serhiy Kaplychnyy, who oversees funerals and death registrations for the Bucha municipality.

“We had to beg the Russians to let us bury them. They told us it was still cold, so it didn't matter, they could lie there. But the dogs were starting to eat them. In the end we convinced them it was a sanitary issue and they let us dig the grave at the church of Andrew the Apostle since it was near both their military position and the morgue and hospital.”

The first tranche of bodies numbered around 70, several locals said. Then there was a second mass burial of another 33 people. In total, around 150 civilians are believed to be lying in the church site.

A group of around two dozen Bucha residents were waiting on the other side of the church on Friday for the bodies of their loved ones to be unearthed.

Ludmyla Skakalova, a paramedic with a drawn, exhausted face, said she was one of only four people left working at the town's hospital after their last doctor was injured, and that they had opened the doors to wounded Russians, too.

“The soldiers also targeted us,” she said. “Once the Russians called and said there was an emergency, to lure out one of the ambulance drivers and someone from the territorial defence. Then a sniper shot them. The driver died.” Snipers shot civilians in the legs as they tried to get water at a well, killing at least one woman, said Tatyana Lipinska, a volunteer at the Bucha city council helpline, and soldiers abducted at least one volunteer delivering medicine to elderly people.

Kukharenko Vyacheslav, a large man of 47 with a gentle voice and bright blue eyes, spent most of the day crying quietly next to the grave. He was not looking for a loved one. He felt guilty, he said, tortured by what he described as his own “cowardice” in the face of the invasion, and felt the need to bear witness.

“Volunteers from a nearby village tried to come help us, and the Russians shot them in the street. Then my neighbour went out to help, and they killed him too,” he said. “We were 11 children and 10 adults all hiding in a basement, and I was so afraid the youngest baby would cry and let the Russians know where we were.”

A few days later, Vyacheslav talked to a group of soldiers for an hour when they came to check the household's passports. “I asked them, ‘Why are you doing this?’ and they replied that it was just orders. They knew that other units were killing civilians, but said it wasn't them,” he said.

“They said we are brothers. What kind of brother arrives at your home on a tank and shoots your neighbour?” he said. “I think they were even afraid of each other.”

Haylena Fiaktistava, 70, was among those hoping to find answers in the mass grave. She spent the occupation sheltering at home with her two sons, Dmitro and Andrei, but one day Dmitro left the house to find bread, and never came back. During a respite in the shelling three days later, Haylena and Andrei went out and found him lying face down in the middle of the road a few streets away, bullet holes in his back.

Another relative helped Andrei to take Dmitro's body to the morgue, but it was full. Not sure what else to do, they left him under the small white building's awning. Later, they heard that all of the bodies at the morgue had been buried in the church grounds.

“We wrote his name and address on a piece of paper and put it inside one of his socks so we can find him again,” she said. “I just want to give him a proper funeral.”

When satellite pictures of the mass grave at the church of Andrew the Apostle emerged earlier this week, before Ukrainian troops reentered the town, Russia was quick to deny the atrocities committed here. Footage and photographs of dead civilians had been “ordered” by the US to sully Moscow’s reputation, Russia’s foreign ministry said.

Events at the Bucha church on Friday gave an irrefutable truth to the Kremlin’s lies.

A military chaplain arrived soon after the exhumation of the mass grave began. He put a stole on over his fatigues and held a wooden cross while he blessed the pit with holy water and sang an Orthodox memorial service.

Anna Stefaniuk, along with her husband Volodymyr and mother Natalia Lukyanenko, silently watched the investigators work. Stefaniuk was missing her brother, Lukyanenko’s son; Volodymyr was also missing a brother. The family were simultaneously desperate for answers, and afraid of what the grave might tell them.

As the fourth body bag was unzipped and shown to the mourners, Volodymyr let out a harrowing cry and collapsed on the ground. The grave had given up one of its many secrets: his brother’s remains were among the tangle of tortured limbs and bloodied faces.

A biting wind blew as he covered his face and sobbed. Anna leaned over him, touching her head to his.

Springtime birdsong echoed down from the church’s tall arches. Not far from the church gate, blue and yellow crocus buds were beginning to force their way up through the soil, the first blooms of a Ukrainian spring like no other.

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HEADLINE	04/10 Zelenskiy: Putin is targeting all of Europe
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/10/putins-target-is-entire-european-project-says-zelenskiy-as-ukraine-braces-for-eastern-assault
GIST	<p>Volodymyr Zelenskiy has said Russia is targeting all of Europe with its aggression and that stopping the invasion of Ukraine is essential for the security of all democracies.</p> <p>Officials have said a grave with dozens of Ukrainians civilians was found in Buzova village near Kyiv, the latest such discovery as Russian forces retreat from their offensive on the capital and shift their assault to the east.</p> <p>In his late-night address to Ukrainians on Saturday, the Ukrainian president said Russian aggression “was not intended to be limited to Ukraine alone” and the “entire European project is a target for Russia”.</p> <p>“That is why it is not just the moral duty of all democracies, all the forces of Europe, to support Ukraine’s desire for peace,” he said. “This is, in fact, a strategy of defence for every civilised state.</p> <p>“This will be a hard battle, we believe in this fight and our victory. We are ready to simultaneously fight and look for diplomatic ways to put an end to this war.”</p> <p>His address came as civilians continued to flee eastern parts of the country before an expected onslaught and firefighters searched for survivors in a northern town no longer occupied by Russian forces.</p> <p>Zelenskiy thanked the leaders of Britain and Austria for their visits on Saturday to Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital, and pledges of further support.</p>

He also thanked the European Commission president and Canada's prime minister for a global fundraising event that brought in more than €10bn for Ukrainians who have fled their homes. Zelenskiy repeated his call for a complete embargo on Russian oil and gas, which he called the sources of Russia's "self-confidence and impunity".

"Freedom does not have time to wait," Zelenskiy said. "When tyranny begins its aggression against everything that keeps the peace in Europe, action must be taken immediately."

More than six weeks after the invasion began, Russia has pulled its troops from the northern part of the country, around Kyiv, and [refocused on the Donbas region in the east](#). Maxar satellite imagery showed an eight-mile (13km) convoy of military vehicles headed south to the Donbas region through the Ukrainian town of Velykyi Burluk.

Western military analysts said an arc of territory in eastern Ukraine was under Russian control, from Kharkiv – Ukraine's second-largest city – in the north to Kherson in the south.

But counterattacks are threatening Russian control of Kherson, according to the western assessments, and Ukrainian forces are repelling Russian assaults elsewhere in the Donbas, a largely Russian-speaking and industrial region.

Civilians were evacuating eastern Ukraine following a missile strike on Friday that killed at least 52 people and wounded more than 100 at the [Kramatorsk train station](#), where thousands clamoured to leave. With trains not running out of Kramatorsk on Saturday, residents boarded buses or looked for other ways to leave, fearing the kind of unrelenting assaults and occupations by Russian invaders that brought food shortages, demolished buildings and death to other cities.

"It was terrifying. The horror, the horror," one resident told Sky news, recalling Friday's attack on the train station. "Heaven forbid, to live through this again. No, I don't want to."

Zelenskiy called the train station attack the latest example of war crimes by Russian forces. Russia denied responsibility.

The Kramatorsk mayor, Oleksander Honcharenko, said he expected just 50,000 to 60,000 of the city's population of 220,000 to remain as people flee.

Residents of the [besieged region of Luhansk](#) would have nine trains on Sunday on which to get out, the region's governor, Serhiy Gaidai, wrote on the Telegram message service.

Ukrainian authorities have worked to identify victims and document possible war crimes in the north. The mayor of [Bucha, a town near Kyiv where graphic evidence of civilian slayings emerged](#) after Russian forces withdrew, said search teams were still finding bodies of people shot at close range in yards, parks and city squares.

Workers unearthed 67 corpses on Friday from a mass grave near a church, according to Ukraine's prosecutor general. Russia has falsely claimed that the scenes in Bucha were staged.

Ukrainian authorities have said they expect to find more mass killings once they reach the southern port city of Mariupol, which is also in the Donbas and has been subjected to a month-long blockade and intense fighting. The city's location on the Sea of Azov is critical to establishing a land bridge from the Crimean peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine eight years ago.

As journalists who had been largely absent from the city began to trickle back in, new images emerged of the devastation from an airstrike on a theatre last month that reportedly killed hundreds of civilians seeking shelter.

Ukrainian officials have pleaded with western powers almost daily to send more arms and further punish Moscow with sanctions, including the exclusion of Russian banks from the global financial system and a total EU embargo on Russian gas and oil.

During his visit on Saturday, the Austrian chancellor, Karl Nehammer, said he expected more EU sanctions against Russia but defended his country's opposition so far to cutting off deliveries of Russian gas, while acknowledging that "as long as people are dying, every sanction is still insufficient". Austria is militarily neutral and not a member of Nato.

The visit by Boris Johnson, the British PM, came a day after the UK pledged an additional £100m in high-grade armaments. Johnson also confirmed further economic support, guaranteeing an additional \$500m in World Bank lending to Ukraine, taking Britain's total loan guarantee to up to \$1bn.

The visits are a sign that Kyiv is returning to some degree of normality.

Some residents are coming back and cafes and restaurants are reopening. Italy said it planned to reopen its embassy this month.

The European Union on Friday adopted new sanctions against Russia, including bans on the import of coal, wood, chemicals and other products. Oil and gas imports from Russia remain untouched.

Ukraine has banned all imports from Russia, a key trading partners before the war with annual imports valued at about \$6bn.

In the interview with AP, Zelenskiy noted increased support for the Ukrainian war effort, but when asked if it was sufficient to shift the war's outcome, he replied: "Not yet," switching to English for emphasis. "Of course it's not enough."

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HEADLINE	04/09 Officials: Putin may interfere US politics
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/09/us-officials-intelligence-putin-russia-american-politics
GIST	<p>Vladimir Putin may use the Biden administration's support for Ukraine as a pretext to order a new campaign to interfere in American politics, US intelligence officials have assessed.</p> <p>Intelligence agencies have not found any evidence Putin has authorized measures like the ones Russia is believed to have undertaken in the 2016 and 2020 elections in support of Donald Trump, according to several people familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity.</p> <p>But given Putin's antipathy toward the west and his repeated denunciations of Ukraine, officials believe he may see the US backing of Ukraine's resistance as a direct affront, giving him further incentive to target another US election, the people said. It is not yet clear which candidates Russia might try to promote or what methods it might use.</p> <p>The assessment comes with the US electoral system under pressure. The US public remains sharply divided over the last election and the insurrection that followed at the US Capitol, when supporters of Trump tried to stop the certification of his loss to Joe Biden. Trump has repeatedly assailed intelligence officials and claimed investigations of Russian influence on his campaigns to be political vendettas.</p> <p>Tensions between Washington and Moscow have reached levels not seen since the end of the cold war. The White House has increased military support for Ukraine, which has mounted a robust resistance against Russian forces accused of committing war crimes, and helped impose global sanctions that have crippled Russia's economy.</p> <p>There is no sign the war will end soon, which some experts say could delay Moscow from pursuing retaliation while its resources are mired in Ukraine.</p>

But “it’s almost certain that a depleted Russian military after Ukraine is going to again double down on hybrid tactics to wreak havoc against us and other allied countries”, said David Salvo, deputy director of the German Marshall Fund’s Alliance for Securing Democracy.

In Ukraine and in past campaigns, Russia has been accused of trying to spread disinformation, amplifying pro-Kremlin voices and using cyberattacks to disrupt governments.

Top US intelligence officials are still working on plans for a new center authorized by Congress focusing on foreign influence campaigns by Russia, China and other adversaries. Avril Haines, the US director of national intelligence, recently appointed a career CIA officer, Jeffrey Wichman, to the position of election threats executive several months after the departure of the previous executive, Shelby Pierson.

“Our Election Threats Executive continues to lead the intelligence community’s efforts against foreign threats to US elections,” said Nicole de Haay, a spokesperson for Haines. “We’re also continuing to work to deliver on the legislative requirement to create a center to integrate intelligence on foreign malign influence.”

De Haay declined to comment on what intelligence officials think of Putin’s intentions. Russia’s embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment.

Foreign adversaries have long looked to interfere in US politics. The US has accused Putin of ordering influence operations to try to help Trump in 2020. A bipartisan Senate investigation of the 2016 election confirmed intelligence findings that Russia used cyber-espionage and information efforts to boost Trump and disparage his opponent, Hillary Clinton.

Special counsel Robert Mueller’s near-two-year investigation found no conclusive evidence the Trump campaign conspired with Russia, but Mueller declined to pass judgment on whether Trump obstructed justice.

Trump continues to falsely insist the election he lost to Biden was stolen, with Republicans following his lead and opposing election security measures.

Law enforcement and intelligence agencies continuously investigate foreign influence efforts. The US justice department last month charged five men with acting on behalf of China to harass Chinese dissidents in the US and derail a little-known congressional candidate.

Experts say the proposed Foreign Malign Influence Center would bring much-needed direction to efforts across government studying adversaries. Congress provided partial funding for the center in the budget passed last month.

The center has been delayed over questions within the intelligence director’s office and on Capitol Hill about its structure and size and whether it would unnecessarily duplicate efforts that already exist. Congress last month required the director’s office to complete within six months a report on the “future structure, responsibilities, and organizational placement” of the center.

Mike Turner of Ohio, the top Republican on the House intelligence committee, said the committee was closely watching “the malign activities of our adversaries” and the proposed center could be one way to help.

“As Russia continues to use disinformation campaigns in Ukraine, we are reminded to be strategic in our response to countering their tactics,” Turner said. “It is no secret that our adversaries use disinformation to undermine the national security interests of the US, so we must take into account all viable options to protect our democracy.”

HEADLINE	04/09 Russia shuffles command in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/09/world/europe/russia-ukraine-general-kramatorsk.html
GIST	<p>Russia reorganized the command of its flagging offensive in Ukraine on Saturday, selecting for the mission a general accused of ordering strikes on civilian neighborhoods in Syria as Western nations poured more weapons into the country in anticipation of a renewed Russian assault in the east.</p> <p>The appointment of the general, Alexander Dvornikov, as the top battlefield commander came as Britain announced that it was sending an anti-aircraft missile system, 800 anti-tank missiles and assorted armored vehicles to Ukraine, and as Slovakia handed the Ukrainian military a long-range S-300 air defense system, with the blessing of the United States.</p> <p>In another show of support for Ukraine, Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain made a surprise visit Saturday to Kyiv, the capital, where he met with Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and discussed a "new package of financial and military aid," the British government said.</p> <p>Zelenskyy called on other Western leaders to similarly provide military aide to Ukraine and impose further sanctions on Russia.</p> <p>"Other Western democratic countries should follow the U.K.'s example," Zelenskyy said after meeting with Johnson.</p> <p>The two leaders walked through the mostly empty cobbled streets of Kyiv in a show of confidence that the Ukrainian capital was now safe from Russian attacks. Outside a shop, one man warmly greeted them, thanking Johnson for Britain's support in effusive Ukrainian as Zelenskyy translated.</p> <p>"In the last few weeks, the world has found new heroes, and those heroes are the people of Ukraine," said Johnson.</p> <p>"What Putin has done in places like Bucha and Irpin, his war crimes, have permanently polluted his reputation and the reputation of his government," he added. "There is a huge amount to do to make sure that Ukraine is successful, that Ukraine wins and that Putin fails."</p> <p>The effort by Johnson to bolster Ukraine came as fears of a new Russian onslaught escalated. Despite its large army and considerable military might, Russia was unable to take Kyiv and now appears to be scrambling to retain dominance in Ukraine's southeast, appointing a new commander for its offensive and withdrawing troops from the capital to an area where it has the advantage of support from local ethnic Russian separatists.</p> <p>"Russian forces continue to attempt to regroup and redeploy units withdrawn from northeastern Ukraine to support an offensive in eastern Ukraine, but these units are unlikely to enable a Russian breakthrough and face poor morale," said a report from the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank.</p> <p>Even so, Russia's air campaign and missiles continue to cause grave damage. A missile attack on a train station in the eastern city of Kramatorsk on Friday killed more than 50 people, including children, and injured many more who were heeding official warnings to flee.</p> <p>Moscow denied responsibility for the attack, but U.S. military officials and independent analysts in Washington said they believed Russian forces had launched the missiles.</p> <p>In a statement condemning the train station attack, the European Union said Saturday that Russia was clearly culpable and that "attempts to hide Russia's responsibility for this and other crimes using disinformation and media manipulations are unacceptable."</p> <p>Zelenskyy described the attack as "another war crime" and said it would be investigated, along with other atrocities attributed to Russian troops, including the apparent murders of civilians in Bucha, a suburb of Kyiv.</p>

“Like the massacre in Bucha, like many other Russian war crimes, the missile strike on Kramatorsk must be one of the charges at the tribunal, which is bound to happen,” Zelenskyy said, calling for Russian commanders to face trials like those faced by the Nazis at Nuremberg after World War II.

Japan said it would join the United States and European nations in supporting investigations and would expel eight Russian diplomats, ban Russian coal and restrict Russian imports of timber, vodka and machinery.

Japan accused Russia of repeatedly attacking civilians and nuclear power plants, a sore point for Japan after the 2011 nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

“We must hold Russia strictly accountable for these atrocities,” Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said.

Legal experts have said that bringing war crimes charges against Kremlin officials would be difficult. The burden of proof is very high, requiring prosecutors to show that soldiers and their commanders intended to violate the international law that establishes the rules of war.

Western analysts and European intelligence officials believe that Russian President Vladimir Putin is trying to achieve battlefield gains by May 9, when he is planning to give a victory day speech commemorating both the Soviet victory in World War II and the military operation in Ukraine.

On Saturday, Russian forces stepped up shelling in eastern Ukraine, with explosions reported in the Odesa and Kharkiv regions. The massing of Russian forces in the region, after they withdrew from areas around Kyiv, has prompted officials in the east to urge residents to flee. And thousands have.

“The Russian troops are coming, so we are leaving to save our lives,” said Svitlana Kyrychenko, 47, who evacuated from Kramatorsk with her 18-year-old daughter, elderly mother and aunt Saturday morning. She was at the train station in the central city of Dnipro, looking for a place to stay.

“I brought nothing with me,” she said. “I only brought my documents and clothes to change into for a few days.”

Elsewhere in Dnipro, dozens of people waited to board buses to Bulgaria.

“The air raids are becoming more and more frequent,” said Ludmila Abramova, 62, who had fled from Pavlograd, a city close to the eastern Donbas region, where Russia has been refocusing its forces. “I’m leaving.”

“But it’s all going to be all right,” Abramova added. “I’ll be back soon.”

More than 6,600 people managed to flee besieged Ukrainian cities Friday — a record number for the week — according to the country’s deputy prime minister, Iryna Vereshchuk.

But in Kramatorsk, there was no sense of panic after the train station attack, said the mayor, Oleksandr Honcharenko. He said that he expected about one-quarter of the city’s 200,000 residents to stay there and was preparing food, water and medical supplies.

“The only thing that will convince them to leave the city is if it comes under siege,” Honcharenko said.

Fewer than 400 people had boarded buses out of Kramatorsk on Saturday, he said, presumably headed for areas to the west that are believed to be safer.

More than 7 million Ukrainians have left their homes since the invasion Feb. 24, and more than 4.4 million have left the country altogether, in the fastest-moving exodus of European refugees since World War II, according to the United Nations.

The appointment of Dvornikov came as the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank that tracks the fighting, said in its latest assessment that Russian forces in the east appeared to be stalled and were “unlikely to enable a Russian breakthrough and face poor morale.”

Dvornikov was the first commander dispatched by Moscow to oversee Russian forces in Syria’s civil war in 2015 after the Kremlin intervened to shore up President Bashar Assad’s struggling military.

Dvornikov was there for about a year and was named a hero of the Russian Federation for his role. He oversaw forces that have been widely accused of bombing civilian neighborhoods, targeting hospitals and resorting to other scorched-earth tactics to break the back of the rebel movement that sought to oust Assad.

“Bashar al-Assad is not the only one to be held accountable for killing civilians in Syria. The Russian general should, too,” said Rami Abdulrahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor based in Britain. “As the commander of military operations, that means he’s behind killing Syrian civilians by giving the orders.”

The actions of the Syrian government and Russian forces were widely decried by Western officials and human rights organizations, which said that some of their tactics amounted to war crimes.

The commander of a Syrian Christian militia that received support from and fought alongside Russian forces in Syria said Dvornikov was involved in battles in many parts of the country.

“He was a real commander, very serious, proud of the Russian army and its military history,” the commander said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak with journalists.

Russia had been running its military campaign against Ukraine out of Moscow, with no central commander on the ground to coordinate air, ground and sea units. That approach helped to explain why the invasion struggled against an unexpectedly stiff Ukrainian resistance and was plagued by poor logistics and flagging morale, U.S. officials said.

The disorganized assault also contributed to the deaths of at least seven Russian generals, as high-ranking officers were pushed to the front lines to untangle tactical problems that Western militaries would have left to more junior officers or senior enlisted personnel.

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HEADLINE	04/09 Plot kidnap governor ends: no convictions
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/in-outcome-of-whitmer-case-some-see-freedom-others-danger/
GIST	<p>Outside the Michigan courthouse where a jury did not convict any of the four men charged with planning to kidnap Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a defense lawyer said jurors saw the alleged plot as what it was: Dirty FBI tactics and “rough talk.”</p> <p>The men — who were heard on audio during the trial talking about killing Whitmer, blowing up a bridge and other violence — didn’t say anything shocking, attorney Michael Hills said. He noted one of the defense witnesses he considered calling to testify planned to assert that he’s “heard worse from pregnant mothers up on the Capitol.”</p> <p>“If I don’t like the governor and it’s rough talk, I can do that in our country. That’s what’s beautiful about this country. That’s what’s great about it,” Hills said. “So hurrah, freedom in America. It’s still here.”</p>

But to others, Friday's outcome following a weekslong trial was a chilling reminder that the political violence that is raging across the U.S. too often goes unpunished. From attacks on social media and elsewhere that disproportionately affect women lawmakers, to the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and the plan to abduct Whitmer, people are increasingly angry and feeling emboldened to act on it, they say.

Whitmer, a Democrat, has blamed former President Donald Trump for stoking anger over COVID-19 restrictions and refusing to condemn right-wing extremists. On Friday, her office said people across the country are experiencing "a normalization" of violence. A Democratic state lawmaker said the threats posed won't be taken seriously "until someone dies."

"The plot to kidnap and kill a governor may seem like an anomaly. But we must be honest about what it really is: the result of violent, divisive rhetoric that is all too common across our country," Whitmer's chief of staff, JoAnne Huls, said in a statement. "There must be accountability and consequences for those who commit heinous crimes. Without accountability, extremists will be emboldened."

Whitmer wasn't a trial witness, didn't attend the trial and has not directly commented on the proceedings, but on Saturday, she alluded to the trial's outcome.

"I have often been asked why the heck do I want to keep doing this job. And after yesterday I'm sure we all have to ask that question maybe once or twice," she said during a speech at the Michigan Democratic Party Endorsement Convention in Detroit. "But here's the reason: Tough times call for tough people and we are going to get through this together."

Four men — Adam Fox, Barry Croft Jr., Brandon Caserta and Daniel Harris — were arrested in October 2020. Federal prosecutors said they wanted to kidnap Whitmer because they were angry over pandemic restrictions she imposed, and saw her as a "tyrant" who needed to be removed.

The charges came at a particularly divisive time, with debate raging over the pandemic and just weeks before the 2020 presidential election between Trump and Joe Biden. Armed protests were occurring at the Michigan Capitol and elsewhere in the U.S., and in the streets of many cities, demonstrations over the police killing of George Floyd at times turned violent.

Prosecutors presented evidence at the federal trial in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from undercover agents, an FBI informant and two men who pleaded guilty to the plot. Jurors also read and heard secretly recorded conversations, violent social media posts and chat messages.

Defense attorneys argued that the men were entrapped by the FBI — pulled into an alleged plot they would never have participated in if not for the government and its informants luring them. They painted the men as wannabes who were frequently high and easily influenced, or in one case, a former member of the military who wanted to brush up on firearms training.

Before returning their verdicts, the jury said that after nearly five days of deliberations they could not agree unanimously on all 10 of the charges against the men.

Harris, 24, and Caserta, 33, were found not guilty of conspiracy. Harris also was acquitted of charges related to explosives and a gun.

The jury could not reach verdicts for Fox, 38, and Croft, 46, which means the government can put them on trial again.

U.S. Attorney Andrew Birge said after the verdicts that "We have two defendants that are awaiting trial and we'll get back to work on that."

	<p>Hills, who defended Caserta, said the outcome was a message to the government that the FBI's actions were "unconscionable." He said the federal government should "let it go" rather than take Croft and Fox to trial a second time.</p> <p>Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Republican, tweeted after the verdict that the "FBI and DOJ need a complete and total cleansing. ... All the rot must be removed and these agencies must be restored."</p> <p>Others were stunned by the jury's decision, and said it set a dangerous example.</p> <p>U.S. Rep. Debbie Dingell, a Democrat, called for an end to "the hatred and division in this country" and said she is "Deeply concerned that today's decision in the Whitmer kidnapping trial will give people further license to choose violence and threats."</p> <p>Michigan Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist called on elected officials, parents, teachers and others to stand up to "these hateful actions and teach our kids that there is a better way."</p> <p>"Our differences must be settled at the ballot box, not through violence," he said. "We need to be honest and clear about what causes violence by extremists and do all we can to address the root cause of it."</p> <p>Michigan state Rep. Laurie Pohutsky, a Democrat, noted on Twitter that a man who threatened to kill her in 2020 was acquitted.</p> <p>"The next time you ask why we can't get good people to run for office, consider today's verdict," she said, adding, "This won't be taken seriously until someone dies."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Sweden, Finland security risk concerns
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/swedes-finns-worry-about-security-risk-on-the-path-to-nato/
GIST	<p>As Sweden and Finland deliberate joining NATO, the two countries are seeking more clarity on how to bridge the gap between filing their applications and when the military alliance's security guarantees would kick in with full membership.</p> <p>While there is little sign that the two Nordic nations would struggle to secure acceptance, Russia has repeatedly warned both against joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and so they are concerned about potential aggression from Moscow if they formally signal their alignment with the western bloc.</p> <p>Public backing for joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization underwent a historic shift in both nations after Russia invaded Ukraine, and in Finland, almost half of all lawmakers now openly support an application.</p> <p>As policymakers have gone on a diplomatic overdrive to remove any doubts about being welcomed by all members, they seek more certainty about near-term guarantees that they wouldn't be left alone against Russia. NATO's Article 5 mutual defense clause only applies to members.</p> <p>"Finland's concern over the gray zone between the membership application and full membership" is "quite well understood among NATO countries," Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto said on Thursday.</p> <p>It could take between four months and a year for the 30 NATO members to ratify their applications, Haavisto said, signaling he'd been given indication countries would be willing to hurry the process.</p> <p>Asked about their possible memberships, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said earlier this week that he expected all 30 allies would welcome them if they decided to apply. He said NATO "will find ways to also address the concerns" about the interim period.</p>

Finland and Sweden already have some degree of collective security commitments through their membership of the European Union. Article 42.7 of the EU treaty states that if a member is the victim of armed aggression, other members have the obligation to aid them, but this doesn't bind the U.S. in the way that their membership in NATO would.

NATO officials say they would welcome Finnish and Swedish membership and point to long and deep partnerships with the countries, including through regular joint military exercises with their armed forces.

Any membership bid from Sweden hinges on the ruling Social Democrats changing their stance, while Finns appear to have made up their minds to join and are putting together a parliamentary process designed to engage lawmakers from across the political spectrum.

A security-policy white paper due in Helsinki next week won't contain a proposal for joining, but the government and president are prepared to submit an addendum on that "when the time is right" after they are satisfied lawmakers back the bid, Haavisto said.

"I think we will end the discussion before midsummer," Prime Minister Sanna Marin told reporters on Friday, referring to a holiday that falls on June 25 this year. "We will have very careful discussions, but we will also not take any more time than we have to in this process, because the situation is of course very severe," she said.

Sweden and Finland have for years worked closely with allies on military interoperability, on exercises, training and also meet NATO standards when it comes to political, democratic, civilian, control over the security institutions and the armed forces, Stoltenberg said.

"There are no other countries that are closer to NATO," Stoltenberg said on Wednesday.

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HEADLINE	04/10 Tolls likely new I-5 bridge linking WA, OR
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/tolls-likely-on-new-i-5-bridge-connecting-wa-and-or/
GIST	<p>Tolling federally funded highways like Interstate 5 is illegal, except when it's not. So could tolls be used to pay part of the cost of replacing the I-5 bridge connecting Washington and Oregon?</p> <p>Under federal law, it appears that tolls are not allowed on federally funded infrastructure projects. But like with so many laws, exemptions have been created over time.</p> <p>There are two "mainstream" tolling programs, which don't restrict the number of states or projects that can get federal tolling authority. They also don't require an agreement with the Federal Highway Administration.</p> <p>The first allows for tolling that pays for the construction of new highways, as well as the reconstruction or replacement of bridges, tunnels or roads. The second allows for tolling of vehicles using high-occupancy vehicle lanes.</p> <p>Then there are tolling projects that the federal government has authorized. Agencies charging the tolls are required to have an agreement with the Federal Highway Administration.</p> <p>Washington currently has five tolled roads, bridges and tunnels: the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, the Highway 520 floating bridge, the Highway 99 tunnel, the Interstate 405 Express Toll Lanes and the Highway 167 High Occupancy Toll Lanes. All five are in the Puget Sound region.</p> <p>The current Interstate 5 bridge has been tolled twice, once after each span was completed.</p>

	<p>The original northbound span, opened in 1917, charged a 5-cent toll for all horses and cars until 1929. The Interstate 5 system, which incorporated the bridge, wasn't designated until 1957. At the time, the southbound span was under construction. It opened in 1960. Both bridges were tolled until 1966.</p> <p>As part of the previous bridge project, the Columbia River Crossing, the Washington Legislature authorized tolling. For the new bridge to gain tolling approval, the legislature will need to approve the tolling project before it can go into effect. This will likely come up in the 2023 legislative session.</p> <p>The Washington State Transportation Commission oversees toll rates, policies and exemptions, according to state law. But because the bridge is a bi-state project, Oregon's tolling authority, the Oregon Transportation Commission, will be working with the Washington commission to set the tolling policies and rates. Oregon has already approved tolling on the new I-5 bridge.</p> <p>The agencies and bridge program don't yet know how the process for setting the toll rates and such will go. It's expected that tolling won't start until late 2025 or early 2026, assuming the Washington Legislature grants its approval for the project.</p> <p>The system is expected to be interoperable with other tolls in Western states, including Washington, Oregon, California, Utah and Colorado.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 WA ferries to phase-in reopening of galleys
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/beer-and-popcorn-to-return-to-wa-ferries/
GIST	<p>Among all the bars and restaurants that have recently reopened their doors, one establishment has remained conspicuously cordoned off: the galleys on Washington's ferries.</p> <p>Beer and popcorn lovers of the world, rejoice, for service aboard the boats will soon return.</p> <p>Two years since the once-bustling watering holes for commuters, tourists and pleasure cruisers went quiet, the Sodexo-run cafeterias are set to open this month – possibly as soon as next week. Ian Sterling, spokesperson for the ferries, said it's been a long time coming; few topics are more commonly broached by customers than the timeline for clam chowder's return, he said.</p> <p>"For us, this is a sign of progress and hopefully the same to customers," Sterling said Saturday.</p> <p>Some caveats are in order. The rollout will be phased, meaning just five boats on four routes will see service: Anacortes, Bainbridge, Bremerton and Edmonds. Just one of the two boats between Seattle and Bainbridge will open its galley, meaning passengers will have a 50% chance of snagging a frozen treat. Food service will open on two out of four boats leaving Anacortes.</p> <p>The Edmonds-to-Kingston and Seattle-to-Bremerton routes are both down to one-boat services because of staffing, meaning riders may have a long wait to board, but can at least look forward to an IPA or chardonnay once they finally do begin their passage.</p> <p>"We want to make sure it's staffed up right and our staff are properly trained," said Paul Pettis, communications director for Sodexo.</p> <p>The Kitsap Sun first reported on food service returning.</p> <p>The galley service is a symbiotic relationship: Washington State Ferries provides the space and the contractor, Sodexo, provides the service, including the vending machines.</p> <p>Dining areas closed in early 2020, along with most of the rest of the service industry, and haven't reopened since. One reason, said ferry spokesperson Justin Fujioka, is that the boats shut off their water supply during the early days of the pandemic. Turning it back on has taken some effort; the water sat for</p>

	<p>so long on most boats that the system needed thorough cleaning. Fujioka said the water is now flowing on all but two boats.</p> <p>Pettis said they've been working with the local union to hash out wages and bring back employees who may have been laid off when the galleys shut down.</p> <p>It's been a difficult few years for the state's largest ferry system. Staffing shortages, as well as construction on Colman Dock in downtown Seattle, have caused chronic delays and cancellations. Both the Bremerton/Seattle and Edmonds/Kingston routes will remain on one-boat service until further notice, said Sterling.</p> <p>Ridership, while trending up, is still below pre-pandemic levels. In the first three months of 2022, 3.26 million people boarded a ferry – a slight increase from 2021, but still 32% lower than during the same period in 2019.</p> <p>The state Legislature dedicated \$4 billion toward the ferries in its most recent session, mostly to bring on new boats and convert existing ferries to hybrid-electric.</p> <p>It remains to be seen when the labor issues and clunky service will subside. But in the meantime, at least passengers can drink a beer along the way.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Navy SEALs face potential WA training ban
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/judge-bans-navy-seal-training-at-wa-state-parks/
GIST	<p>Since 2020, Navy SEALs have been unable to stealthily train at Washington state parks. That pause could become permanent if an April 1 ruling from state Superior Court Judge James Dixon is not overturned on appeal.</p> <p>Navy SEALs first began training at state parks in the early 1980s, and appeared poised to expand that use from five to possibly 17 parks or more under a motion approved by the state Parks and Recreation Commission in January 2021.</p> <p>It was a high-profile, controversial decision that drew hundreds of public comments. The SEALs training exercises are intended to be undetectable by the public. Critics have opposed the training as a kind of militarization of state parks and were upset about the idea that part of the exercises would have included surveillance of park activity.</p> <p>In a scathing verbal opinion from the bench, Dixon found that the Legislature never granted the authority to permit military uses of the state Department of Parks and Recreation.</p> <p>"It's not even a stretch. It just does not exist, either in real words, or by implication," Dixon stated in his bench ruling that found the commission in approving the Navy's use of the park was "outside its statutory authority."</p> <p>The judge also concluded the commission violated a state environmental law by not analyzing "the creep factor" referenced by plaintiffs in a lawsuit challenging the Navy's use of the parks, according to an official transcript of the hearing made by a court reporter.</p> <p>"Over the past few days this court has spent some time trying to articulate another definition or phrase that might adequately describe the emotional impact ... something other than 'creep factor' because it's a long way from a legal term. But I can't find one. It is creepy," Dixon said.</p> <p>Washington state has long offered wide-ranging military training opportunities in the air, at sea and on land, and the judge's decision marked a rare moment when a state court set a limit to where such exercises can take place.</p>

“Washington laws are clear, and Judge Dixon just enforced them. Parks are not for military use,” said Steve Erickson, litigation coordinator for the lawsuit plaintiff, the Whidbey Environmental Action Network.

The decision could be appealed, but what happens next is unclear.

The judge asked the attorney for the Whidbey Environmental Action Network to draw up a proposed order to implement his ruling from the bench. A draft will be circulated among litigants and submitted to the judge for his signature.

Becki Ellison, executive assistant to the Parks and Recreation Commission, said the court’s ruling will be reviewed. “We will post updates to our [Navy webpage](#) as information becomes available,” Ellison said.

In a Jan. 29, 2021, written statement announcing the 4-3 vote to approve the Navy use of state parks, the commission stated that permits to use parks will begin to be issued to the Navy “in the next few weeks.”

But Ellison said Friday that no permits have been issued and no Navy training is now occurring in state parks.

SEALs are elite special operations forces. Navy officials say their request reflects the imperatives of finding more diverse and challenging areas to conduct important training that is not intended to be visible to visitors and will not interfere with the public’s use of the parks.

The training involves submersible vessels that navigate through offshore waters and unarmed SEAL team trainees in groups of six to eight who then make their way to shore, typically under the cover of darkness. Once on land, they conceal themselves for 24 to 48 hours to conduct surveillance, then depart by water.

“These aren’t the guys that are your Rambo guys. ... These are the guys who ghost into the environment and just disappear,” Chief Warrant Officer Esteban Alvarado said at a November 2020 meeting of the state Parks and Recreation Commission.

Opponents of the Navy’s use of parks argued the Navy should find other coastal areas for the training.

Navy spokesperson Joe Overton, in a written statement, said that no single site provides the full range of environments needed for training to be as realistic as possible. The Navy uses military as well as private and public properties where permissions have been granted.

“With the State parks unavailable, the military members who need this critical training, which takes place only a few months each year, will have fewer options to hone their unique skills,” the statement said.

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HEADLINE	04/09 DOH: 5 earlier Covid-attributed deaths
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/deaths-covid-19-washington-us/281-d4119572-14e6-4cd0-8099-2b1b0a6c62b0
GIST	<p>Several deaths now attributed to COVID-19 occurred days before Feb. 28, 2020, the day health officials originally reported the first death took place in Washington state and the U.S., according to the Washington State Department of Health.</p> <p>The first death attributed to COVID-19 in the state actually happened on Feb. 24, 2020, according to the department, four days before the originally reported date of Feb. 28.</p> <p>The death first reported on Feb. 29 was a King County man in his 50s who had an underlying health condition. The death was also the first reported death in the U.S., weeks before the World Health</p>

Organization [declared COVID-19 a pandemic](#). But now it's reported the death wasn't the first in the state or the country.

In a statement Wednesday, the state Department of Health reported five people, all tested post mortem, died from COVID-19 by Feb. 28, 2020. The department said there was one death on Feb. 24, two deaths on Feb. 26, two on Feb. 28 and one death on Feb. 29, 2020.

Due to testing capabilities early on in the pandemic, the deaths weren't reported until March and May 2020, according to the department.

The department clarified that the man, originally reported as the first death in the state, had tested positive for COVID-19 on Feb. 28, which is why it was reported first.

"COVID-19 testing was extremely limited across the United States during the early months of the pandemic. It is likely that health departments nationwide undercounted deaths from COVID-19 infection during this time," said COVID-19 Public Information Officer Jess Nelson with the Washington State Department of Health.

The first recorded death in the U.S. has now been attributed to a 78-year-old Kansas woman, Lovell "Cookie" Brown, who died on Jan. 9, 2020, [The Mercury News](#) reported in 2021.

As of April 8, 2022, 6,172,307 people worldwide have died from COVID-19, according to the [Johns Hopkins University of Medicine](#).

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HEADLINE	04/08 US ends Russia trade relations, oil imports
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/president-biden-ends-russian-trade-relations-oil-imports-1696585
GIST	<p>President Joe Biden has signed legislation blocking Russian oil from being imported into the U.S. and severing all trade relations with the country over its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Biden signed two bills on Friday seeking to further isolate Russia economically as the U.S. maintains pressure on Moscow to end its invasion of Ukraine. The legislation, which passed overwhelmingly in both houses of Congress, will work to strike an economic artery of energy-rich Russia while relegating the country to the same trade status as Myanmar, Cuba and North Korea.</p> <p>While Biden had earlier signed an executive order banning imports of Russian oil and gas, House Resolution 6968 codifies the ban into law.</p> <p>The second bill, H.R. 7108, goes further by suspending normal trade relations with Russia and its ally Belarus. The bill also directs the U.S. trade representative to take steps to suspend Russia's participation in the World Trade Organization (WTO).</p> <p>"We know that it will not immediately end the fund of the Putin war machine, but it is a step in the right direction," Democratic Representative Lloyd Doggett, a sponsor of the Russian oil ban, said on the House floor Wednesday.</p> <p>He noted that it took "six long weeks" to approve the legislation after negotiations with the Senate. As the bills made their way through both chambers, some Republican lawmakers questioned the effectiveness of cutting off Russian oil imports, suggesting they could strengthen the country's ties to China while increasing gas prices.</p> <p>Importing or exporting \$5.6 trillion worth of goods and services in 2019, the U.S. is the world's largest trading nation, according to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR). Countries with a permanent normal trade relations designation have advantages in conducting commerce with the U.S., such as reduced tariffs. The U.S. has used the designation to influence countries on human rights issues.</p>

The passage of the bills comes as U.S. officials have voiced growing alarm of alleged human rights violations committed by Russian soldiers in Ukraine. Biden [has called for](#) Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) to stand trial for war crimes.

Ukrainian President [Volodymyr Zelensky](#) [has called for](#) the U.S. and the European Union to ratchet up sanctions against Russia to end its invasion.

Democratic Representative Richard Neal, chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, hailed the passage of both bills, saying in a statement they'll "hold the Putin regime responsible for its campaign of terror against the Ukrainian people."

Russia was the U.S.'s 40th largest export market in 2019, according to the USTR.

Figures from the Census Bureau show the U.S. does relatively little commerce compared to its largest trading partners that include Mexico, China, Canada and Japan. For instance, the U.S. imported \$29.7 billion worth of goods from Russia in 2021. For Mexico, that number was \$384.7 billion.

The most common U.S. exports to Russia in 2020 included mechanical appliances, chemicals, plastic and leather products as well as transportation equipment, according to a report from the U.S. Office of Technology Evaluation. U.S. imports from Russia included minerals, stone, glass and metals.

Russia is one of the world's largest crude oil producers following the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, [according to the Energy Information Administration](#). In 2021, Russian imports accounted for 8 percent of all U.S. petroleum imports, according to the administration.

Newsweek reached out to the Russian government for comment.

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HEADLINE	04/08 Russia envoy reveals Ukraine war rationale
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/russias-ambassador-us-reveals-why-ukraine-war-began-how-it-could-end-1696596?
GIST	<p>A month and a half into Russia's war in Ukraine, Moscow's envoy to Washington has outlined to <i>Newsweek</i> his country's reasoning for launching what it has deemed a "special military operation" against its neighbor, and detailed the demands that, if satisfied, could end the conflict involving Europe's two largest countries.</p> <p>And as Kyiv (spelled Kiev by Russia) accused the Kremlin of conducting "war crimes" to the extent of "genocide," Russia's ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Antonov, argued it was Ukraine's alleged ethnic cleansing, along with its bid to join the U.S.-led NATO Western military alliance, that fueled the war.</p> <p>"The special operation in Ukraine is the result of the unwillingness of the Kiev regime to stop the genocide of Russians by fulfilling its obligations under the international commitments," Antonov told <i>Newsweek</i>. "The desire of the NATO member states to use the territory of a neighboring state to establish a foothold in the struggle against Russia is also obvious."</p> <p>The senior Russian diplomat said the events of February 24 had roots eight years earlier, when the uprising known to its supporters as the Euromaidan toppled a Ukrainian government with close ties to Moscow and put into power a pro-West administration seeking closer ties with NATO and the European Union.</p> <p>To Russia, Antonov said that the revolution was a "bloody coup d'état instigated by the West" in which "ultranationalist ideas came to power in Kiev." He said that policies viewed by Moscow as hostile such as the removal of Russian as a national language and the rehabilitation of nationalist Ukrainian figures such</p>

as Stepan Bandera, who collaborated with Nazi Germany during World War II, had "taken root in Ukraine under external administration."

As unrest first gripped Ukraine in 2014, Russian forces quickly seized Crimea with the stated goal of protecting the Black Sea peninsula's ethnic Russian majority and, around this time, pro-Moscow separatists took up arms, proclaiming the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk (spelled Lugansk by Russia) People's Republics in the eastern region of Donbas (spelled Donbass by Russia).

Tensions spiraled into all-out fighting between Kyiv and the rebels, killing up to 14,000 people, including civilian casualties that both sides blame the other for inflicting. Two ceasefire attempts known as the Minsk Agreements were reached but bloodshed persisted amid dueling accusations of violations.

Antonov argued that it was the "nationalist frenzy and revanchist sentiments of the Kiev regime" that resulted in the effective death of the Minsk deals as Ukraine chose "the path of rapid militarization" with help from abroad.

"The NATO member countries have commenced a military exploration of Ukraine," Antonov said. "It was flooded with Western weaponry while President Vladimir Zelensky announced Kiev's plans to acquire nuclear weapons which would threaten not only neighboring countries, but also the entire world."

While Ukrainian officials have repeatedly denied any plans to develop nuclear weapons and the [United Nations'](#) atomic agency has also dismissed the argument, President Zelensky (who spells his first name Volodymyr) did question Kyiv's non-nuclear status at a speech delivered at the Munich Security Conference just days before the Russian incursion.

At this point, Russia had amassed nearly 200,000 personnel along Ukraine's borders, including in neighboring Belarus and Crimea. Antonov argued, however, that it was Ukraine that had gathered its forces in preparation for an attack on the rebel states in Donbas, something Kyiv has denied.

"In this context, Russia had no other choice but to recognize the independence of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics," Antonov said. "Then, in accordance with Chapter VII, Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, with the authorization of the Federation Council of Russia and in execution of the Treaties of Friendship and Mutual Assistance with the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic, President of the Russian Federation [Vladimir Putin](#) made a decision to begin a special military operation."

"Its aim is to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine in order to reduce military threats posed by the Western states that are trying to use the fraternal Ukrainian people in the struggle against the Russians," he added.

The goal of the operation, Antonov said, "is to put an end to the genocide perpetrated by the Kiev regime and ensure a nuclear-free and neutral status of Ukraine."

At a time when Ukraine, and a growing number of its foreign partners, including U.S. President [Joe Biden](#), were calling for Russian forces, including Putin to face trial for the war, Antonov said Moscow achieving its aims "requires concluding the hostilities that have been taking place since 2014 as well as bringing to trial those who committed a large number of bloody crimes against civilians, including against citizens of the Russian Federation."

And he dispelled speculation of a plan to exert control over Ukraine in the long term, saying "the occupation of Ukraine is not the goal of the special operation."

He also rejected Ukrainian allegations that Russians were responsible for targeting civilians, such as in Bucha, where hundreds of civilians were reportedly found slaughtered, some execution-style, days after Russia withdrew from the city. Antonov had [previously told Newsweek](#) that grisly scenes of massacres were conducted by Ukrainian forces that entered Bucha shortly before news of the mass killings emerged in international media.

"The Russian Federation is taking the necessary measures to preserve life and safety of civilians," Antonov said. "We do everything to maintain the normal functioning of critical infrastructure facilities, to ensure law and order and the security of people. The strikes are made only on military targets and exclusively with high-precision weapons."

Such strikes were claimed Friday by the Russian Defense Ministry to have "destroyed weapons and military equipment arriving in Donbass at Pokrovsk, Slavyansk and Barvenkovo." Russia has since denied a missile strike against the Kramatorsk station, blaming it instead on Ukrainian forces, which have counted up to 50 dead in what they say was one of their foe's deadliest attacks on civilians to date.

Washington has backed Kyiv's assessment of the incident as the Biden administration and its European allies vowed to send more military assistance to Ukraine. Antonov warned such aid only worsened the conflict and could potentially lead to a direct conflict between the U.S. and Russia.

"Western states are directly involved in the current events as they continue to pump Ukraine with weapons and ammunitions, thereby inciting further bloodshed," Antonov said.

"We warn that such actions are dangerous and provocative as they are directed against our state," he added. "They can lead the U.S. and the Russian Federation onto the path of direct military confrontation. Any supply of weapons and military equipment from the West, performed by transport convoys through the territory of Ukraine, is a legitimate military target for our Armed Forces."

Antonov also reiterated Russian accusations that the [Pentagon](#) had engaged in potentially illicit biological research activities in Ukraine, the result of a 2005 agreement that laid the groundwork for joint bio-research. He asked, "What does the Pentagon have to do with health issues? Why are biolaboratories established along Russian borders—thousands of kilometers away from the American territory?"

Last month, a State Department spokesperson confirmed to *Newsweek* the presence of "Ukrainian diagnostic and biodefense laboratories" but emphasized that these "are not biological weapons facilities" and instead "counter biological threats throughout the country."

Conflicting narratives have been a central tenet of the war in Ukraine, as both sides sought to dominate the information space with their respective claims.

But as Antonov accused the West of "demonizing our country," he asserted that "the policy of our country is based on the right for all the peoples living today in the Ukrainian territory to choose their own future."

"Together we need to get rid of the nationalists who seized power in Kiev as soon as possible, turn this tragic page and move forward to build mutually respectful and equal relations," he added.

In a bid to bring the conflict to an end, representatives of Kyiv and Moscow have engaged in multiple rounds of negotiations, the first of which took place in Belarus just days into the war and the latest of which have taken place in Turkey.

Antonov explained what Russia seeks from these talks.

"Our principled position regarding the settlement of the conflict has been clearly defined," Antonov said, "including the demand for an unconditional consideration of Russia's security interests, the demilitarization and denazification of the Ukrainian state, ensuring its neutral and non-nuclear status as well as the recognition of Russian sovereignty over Crimea and the independence of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics."

Zelensky and his administration have expressed an openness to ending Ukraine's NATO aspirations, and formally forgoing any nuclear plans. But territorial concessions have proven a more arduous area of contention as the Ukrainian government still considers Crimea and the entirety of the Donbas region to be part of the country's territory, a position backed by the international community.

	<p>Nonetheless, Antonov said Moscow sought to bring the conflict to a close at an early date.</p> <p>He told <i>Newsweek</i> that "Russia is doing everything possible to negotiate a path to the prompt completion of the confrontation, the restoration of peace in Donbas and the return of all the peoples of Ukraine to peaceful life."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Ukraine war shatters an illusion in Russia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/09/world/europe/putin-ukraine-russia.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News
GIST	<p>The last time I was in Russia, the summer of 2015, I came face to face with a contradiction. What if a place was unfree, but also happy? How long could it stay that way?</p> <p>Moscow had blossomed into a beautiful, European city, full of meticulously planted parks, bike lanes and parking spaces. Income for the average Russian had risen significantly over the course of the previous decade. At the same time, its political system was drifting ever closer to authoritarianism.</p> <p>Fifteen years earlier, Boris Yeltsin had left power in shame, apologizing on national television “for having failed to justify the hopes of the people who believed that we would be able to make a leap from the gloomy and stagnant totalitarian past to a bright, prosperous and civilized future at just one go.”</p> <p>By the summer of 2015, his successor, President Vladimir V. Putin, had seemingly made Russia bright and prosperous. The political system he built was increasingly restrictive, but many had learned to live with it.</p> <p>Many Russian liberals had gone to work for nonprofits and local governments, throwing themselves into community building — making their cities better places to live. A protest movement in 2011 and 2012 had failed, and people were looking for other ways to shape their country. Big politics were hopeless, the thinking went, but one could make a real difference in small acts.</p> <p>There was another side to this bargain: Mr. Putin was seemingly constrained, as well. Political action may have been forbidden, but there was tolerance when it came to other things, for example religion, culture and many forms of expression. His own calculus for the system to run smoothly meant he had to make some room for society.</p> <p>I lived in Russia for nine years, and began covering it for The New York Times in 2000, the year Mr. Putin was first elected. I spent lots of time telling people — in public writing and in my private life — that Russia might sometimes look bad, but that it had a lot of wonderful qualities, too.</p> <p>But in the weeks since Russia invaded Ukraine, I have felt like I am watching someone I love lose their mind. Many of the Russian liberals who had turned to “small acts” are feeling a sense of shock and horror, too, said Alexandra Arkhipova, a Russian anthropologist.</p> <p>“I see lots of posts and conversations saying these small deeds, it was a big mistake,” she said. “People have a metaphor. They say, ‘We were trying to make some cosmetic changes to our faces, when the cancer was growing and growing in our stomachs.’”</p> <p>I began to wonder whether Russia was always going to end up here, and we just failed to see it. So I called Yevgeniya Albats, a Russian journalist who had warned of the dangers of a K.G.B. resurgence as early as the 1990s. Ms. Albats kept staring into the glare of the idea that at certain points in history, everything is at stake in political thought and action. She had long argued that any bargain with Mr. Putin was an illusion.</p> <p>She said 2008 was a turning point, the moment Mr. Putin divorced the West, even invaded another country, and the West barely noticed.</p>

“For Putin, it was a clear sign,” she said by telephone last month, “that he can do whatever he wants. And that’s exactly what he started doing. He behaved extremely rationally. He just realized that you don’t care.”

She was referring to Russia’s 2008 invasion of Georgia, which came shortly after President George W. Bush began to talk about NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine. I covered that war, and spent the night with a Russian unit in the Georgian town of Gori and remember how invigorated the soldiers seemed, laughing, joking. The Soviet defeat in the Cold War had left a bitter sense of humiliation and loss. The invasion seemed to have renewed them.

“When Putin came, everything changed,” one officer told me. “We got some of our old strength back. People started to respect us again.”

Ms. Albats sounded tired but determined. The day we talked, she had traveled to a Russian penal colony to be present for the sentencing of her friend Aleksei A. Navalny, Russia’s popular opposition leader, who used his allotted time to give a speech against the war.

“We now understand that when Putin decided to go into war in Ukraine, he had to get rid of Navalny,” she said, because he is the only one with the courage to resist.

Indeed, Mr. Navalny never accepted the turn away from direct confrontation and was building a nationwide opposition movement, leading people into the streets. He rejected the bargain and was willing to go to prison to defy it.

Mr. Arkhipova pointed out that his mantra, that the fight was not of good against evil but of good against neutral, was a direct challenge to the political passivity that Mr. Putin was demanding.

Many people I interviewed said the poisoning of Mr. Navalny in 2020 and the jailing of him in early 2021, after years of freedom, marked the end of the social contract and the beginning of Mr. Putin’s war. Like Al Qaeda’s killing of Ahmed Shah Massoud on the eve of Sept. 11, 2001, Mr. Putin had to clear the field of opponents.

Greg Yudin, a professor of political philosophy at the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, argues it was the political opposition’s success, which began to accelerate in 2018 and 2019, that tipped Mr. Putin toward war.

Professor Yudin said it was inconceivable to Mr. Putin that there could be people inside Russia who wanted the best for their country, yet were against him. So he looked for traitors and nursed an obsession with the idea that the West was after him.

“It’s a feature of this kind of regime,” Professor Yudin said. “It recodes internal dissent into external threats.”

As for my 2015 question — how long can a place be unfree and also happy — perhaps we have lived into the answer. Many liberals have left. Many of those who have not left face fines or even jail. In the weeks after the invasion, the police detained more than 15,000 people nationwide, according to OVD-Info, a human rights group, substantially higher than in the protests in 2012, when about 5,000 people were detained over 12 months, said Ms. Arkhipova, who studied that movement.

Ms. Albats has stayed and is angry at Russian liberals who have not.

The message, she said, is that “Russian liberals, they don’t have any tolerance for any problems.” She added, “They just run away.”

At the same time, she said, it's an extremely hard choice. "Choosing between jail and not jail, I'd rather choose not jail," Ms. Albats said, adding that she already faces thousands of dollars in fines just for reporting about the war.

Mr. Yudin said the choice was hard because the crackdown was complete, and because political opposition was now being pulverized.

"The best comparison is Germany in 1939," he said. "What kind of democratic movement would you expect there? This is the same. People are basically right now trying to save their lives."

Not everyone, of course. Lev Gudkov, a sociologist at Levada Center, a research group that tracks Russian public opinion, told me that about two-thirds of people nationwide approve of Mr. Putin's actions in Ukraine.

"It is a less-educated, older part of the population, mainly living in rural areas or in small and medium-sized cities, where the population is poorer and more dependent on power," he said, referring to those who rely on public funds like pensions and state jobs. "They also receive their whole construction of reality exclusively from television."

He points out that "if you look at 20 years of our research since Putin came to power, then the peaks of support for Putin and his popularity have always coincided with military campaigns."

One such campaign was the war in Chechnya, a particularly brutal subduing of a population that in 1999 was Mr. Putin's signature act before being elected president the first time. We are starting to see some of the features of that war in Ukraine: bodies with hands bound, mass graves, tales of torture. In Chechnya, the result was the systematic elimination of anyone connected to the fight against Russia. It is too soon to say whether that was the intent in Bucha.

Now the bargain is broken, the illusion has shattered. And the country has been pitched into a new phase. But what is it? Mr. Yudin argues that Russia is moving out of authoritarianism — where political passivity and civic disengagement are key features — into totalitarianism, which relies on mass mobilization, terror and homogeneity of beliefs. He believes Mr. Putin is on the brink, but may hesitate to make the shift.

"In a totalitarian system, you have to release free energy to start terror," he said. Mr. Putin, he said, "is a control freak, used to micromanagement."

However, if the Russian state starts to fail, either through a collapse of Russia's economy or a complete military defeat in Ukraine, "unleashing terror will be the only way for him to save himself."

Which is why the current situation is so dangerous, for Ukraine and for people in Russia opposed Mr. Putin.

"Putin is so convinced that he cannot afford to lose, that he will escalate," Professor Yudin said. "He has staked everything on it."

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HEADLINE	04/09 Russians turn on one another over war
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/09/world/europe/putin-russia-war-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>Marina Dubrova, an English teacher on the Russian island of Sakhalin in the Pacific, showed an uplifting YouTube video to her eighth-grade class last month in which children, in Russian and Ukrainian, sing about a "world without war."</p> <p>After she played it, a group of girls stayed behind during recess and quizzed her on her views.</p> <p>"Ukraine is a separate country, a separate one," Ms. Dubrova, 57, told them.</p>

“No longer,” one of the girls shot back.

A few days later, the police came to her school in the port town of Korsakov. In court, she heard a recording of that conversation, apparently made by one of the students. The judge handed down a \$400 fine for “publicly discrediting” Russia’s Armed Forces. The school fired her, she said, for “amoral behavior.”

“It’s as though they’ve all plunged into some kind of madness,” Ms. Dubrova said in a phone interview, reflecting on the pro-war mood around her.

With President Vladimir V. Putin’s direct encouragement, Russians who support the war against Ukraine are starting to turn on the enemy within.

The episodes are not yet a mass phenomenon, but they illustrate the building paranoia and polarization in Russian society. Citizens are denouncing one another in an eerie echo of Stalin’s terror, spurred on by vicious official rhetoric from the state and enabled by far-reaching new laws that criminalize dissent.

There are reports of students turning in teachers and people telling on their [neighbors](#) and even the [diners](#) at the next table. In a mall in western Moscow, it was the “no to war” text displayed in a computer repair store and reported by a passer-by that got the store’s owner, Marat Grachev, detained by the police. In St. Petersburg, a local news outlet [documented the furor over](#) suspected pro-Western sympathies at the public library; it erupted after a library official mistook the image of a Soviet scholar on a poster for that of Mark Twain.

In the western region of Kaliningrad, the authorities sent residents text messages urging them to provide phone numbers and email addresses of “provocateurs” in connection with the “special operation” in Ukraine, Russian newspapers [reported](#); they can do so conveniently through a specialized account in the Telegram messaging app. A nationalist political party launched a website urging Russians to report “pests” in the elite.

“I am absolutely sure that a cleansing will begin,” Dmitri Kuznetsov, the member of Parliament behind the website, said in an interview, predicting that the process would accelerate after the “active phase” of the war ended. He then clarified: “We don’t want anyone to be shot, and we don’t even want people to go to prison.”

But it is the history of mass execution and political imprisonment in the Soviet era, and the denunciation of fellow citizens encouraged by the state, that now looms over Russia’s deepening climate of repression. Mr. Putin [set the tone](#) in a speech on March 16, declaring that Russian society needed a “self-purification” in which people would “distinguish true patriots from scum and traitors and simply spit them out like a fly that accidentally flew into their mouths.”

In the Soviet logic, those who choose not to report their fellow citizens could be viewed as being suspect themselves.

“In these conditions, fear is settling into people again,” said Nikita Petrov, a leading scholar of the Soviet secret police. “And that fear dictates that you report.”

In March, Mr. Putin signed a law that punishes public statements contradicting the government line on what the Kremlin terms its “special military operation” in Ukraine with as much as 15 years in prison. It was a harsh but necessary measure, the Kremlin [said](#), given the West’s “information war” against Russia.

Prosecutors have already used the law against more than 400 people, according to the OVD-Info rights group, [including](#) a man who held up a piece of paper with eight asterisks on it. “No to war” in Russian has eight letters.

“This is some kind of enormous joke that we, to our misfortune, are living in,” Aleksandra Bayeva, the head of OVD-Info’s legal department, said of the absurdity of some of the war-related prosecutions. She said she had seen a sharp rise in the frequency of people reporting on their fellow citizens.

“Repressions are not just done by the hands of the state authorities,” she said. “They are also done by the hands of regular citizens.”

In most cases, the punishments related to war criticism have been limited to fines; for the more than 15,000 antiwar protesters arrested since the invasion began on Feb. 24, fines are the most common penalty, though some were sentenced to as many as 30 days in jail, Ms. Bayeva said. But some people are being threatened with longer prison terms.

In the western city of Penza, another English teacher, Irina Gen, arrived in class one day and found a giant “Z” scrawled on the chalkboard. The Russian government has been promoting the letter as a symbol of support for the war, after it was seen painted as an identifying marker on Russian military vehicles in Ukraine.

Ms. Gen told her students it looked like half a swastika.

Later, an eighth grader asked her why Russia was being banned from sports competitions in Europe.

“I think that’s the right thing to do,” Ms. Gen responded. “Until Russia starts behaving in a civilized manner, this will continue forever.”

“But we don’t know all the details,” a girl said, referring to the war.

“That’s right, you don’t know anything at all,” Ms. Gen said.

A recording of that exchange appeared on a popular account on Telegram that often posts inside information about criminal cases. The Federal Security Service, a successor agency to the K.G.B., called her in and warned her that her words blaming Russia for the bombing of a maternity hospital in Mariupol, Ukraine, last month were “100 percent a criminal case.”

She is now being investigated for causing “grave consequences” under last month’s censorship law, punishable by 10 to 15 years in prison.

Ms. Gen, 45, said she found little support among her students or from her school, and quit her job this month. When she talked in class about her opposition to the war, she said she felt “hatred” toward her radiating from some of her students.

“My point of view did not resonate in the hearts and minds of basically anyone,” she said in an interview.

But others who have been the targets of denunciation by fellow citizens drew more hopeful lessons from the experience. On Sakhalin Island, after local news outlets reported on Ms. Dubrova’s case, one of her former students raised \$150 in a day for her, before Ms. Dubrova told her to stop and said she would pay the fine herself. On Friday, Ms. Dubrova handed the money over to a local dog shelter.

In Moscow, Mr. Grachev, the computer repair store owner, said he found it remarkable that not one of his hundreds of customers threatened to turn him in for the “no to war” text that he prominently displayed on a screen behind the counter for several weeks after the invasion. After all, he noted, he was forced to double the price of some services because of Western sanctions, surely angering some of his customers. Instead, many thanked him.

The man who apparently turned in Mr. Grachev was a passer-by he refers to as a “grandpa” who, he said, twice warned his employees in late March that they were violating the law. Mr. Grachev, 35, said he

	<p>believed the man was convinced he was doing his civic duty by reporting the store to the police, and most likely did not have access to information beyond state propaganda.</p> <p>Mr. Grachev was fined 100,000 rubles, more than \$1,200. A Moscow politician wrote about the case on social media, including Mr. Grachev's bank details for anyone who wanted to help. Enough money to cover the fine arrived within two hours, Mr. Grachev said.</p> <p>He received 250,000 rubles in total, he said, from about 250 separate donations, and he plans to donate the surplus to OVD-Info, which provided him with legal aid.</p> <p>"In practice, we see that not everything is so bad," he said in an interview.</p> <p>Mr. Grachev is now pondering how to replace his "no to war" sign. He is considering: "There was a sign here for which a 100,000 ruble fine was imposed."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Russia blunders Chernobyl; 'did whatever'
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/08/world/europe/ukraine-chernobyl.html
GIST	<p>CHERNOBYL, Ukraine — As the staging ground for an assault on the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, one of the most toxic places on earth, was probably not the best choice. But that did not seem to bother the Russian generals who took over the site in the early stages of the war.</p> <p>"We told them not to do it, that it was dangerous, but they ignored us," Valeriy Simyonov, the chief safety engineer for the Chernobyl nuclear site, said in an interview.</p> <p>Apparently undeterred by safety concerns, the Russian forces tramped about the grounds with bulldozers and tanks, digging trenches and bunkers — and exposing themselves to potentially harmful doses of radiation lingering beneath the surface.</p> <p>In a visit to the recently liberated nuclear station, site of the world's worst nuclear disaster in 1986, wind blew swirls of dust along the roads, and scenes of disregard for safety were everywhere, though Ukrainian nuclear officials say no major radiation leak was triggered by Russia's monthlong military occupation.</p> <p>At just one site of extensive trenching a few hundred yards outside the town of Chernobyl, the Russian army had dug an elaborate maze of sunken walkways and bunkers. An abandoned armored personnel carrier sat nearby.</p> <p>The soldiers had apparently camped out for weeks in the radioactive forest. While international nuclear safety experts say they have not confirmed any cases of radiation sickness among the soldiers, the cancers and other potential health problems associated with radiation exposure might not develop until decades later.</p> <p>Mr. Simyonov said that the Russian military had deployed officers from a nuclear, biological and chemical unit, as well as experts from Rosatom, Russia's state nuclear power company, who consulted with the Ukrainian scientists.</p> <p>But the Russian nuclear experts seemed to hold little sway over the army commanders, he said. The military men seemed more preoccupied with planning the assault on Kyiv and, after that failed, using Chernobyl as an escape route to Belarus for their badly mauled troops.</p> <p>"They came and did whatever they wanted" in the zone around the station, Mr. Simyonov said. Despite efforts by him and other Ukrainian nuclear engineers and technicians who remained at the site through the occupation, working round-the-clock and unable to leave except for one shift change in late March, the entrenching continued.</p>

The earthworks were not the only instance of recklessness in the treatment of a site so toxic it still holds the potential to spread radiation well beyond Ukraine's borders.

In a particularly ill-advised action, a Russian soldier from a chemical, biological and nuclear protection unit picked up a source of cobalt-60 at one waste storage site with his bare hands, exposing himself to so much radiation in a few seconds that it went off the scales of a Geiger counter, Mr. Simyonov said. It was not clear what happened to the man, he said.

The most concerning moment, Mr. Simyonov said, came in mid-March, when electrical power was cut to a cooling pool that stores spent nuclear fuel rods that contain many times more radioactive material than was dispersed in the 1986 catastrophe. That raised the concern among Ukrainians of a fire if the water cooling the fuel rods boiled away, exposing them to the air, though that prospect was quickly dismissed by experts. "They're emphasizing the worst-case scenarios, which are possible but not necessarily plausible," said Edwin Lyman, a reactor expert at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

The greater risk in a prolonged electricity shut off, experts say, was that hydrogen generated by the spent fuel could accumulate and explode. Bruno Chareyron, laboratory director at CRIIRAD, a French group that monitors radiation risks, cited a 2008 study of the Chernobyl site suggesting this could happen within about 15 days.

Eventually, however, electricity was restored to the plant, allaying any fears.

The march to Kyiv on the western bank of the Dnipro River began and ended in Chernobyl for the 31st and 36th Combined Arms Armies of the Russian military, which traveled with an auxiliary of special forces and ethnic Chechen combatants.

The formation surged into Ukraine on Feb. 24, fought for most of a month in the suburbs of Kyiv and then retreated, leaving in its wake incinerated armored vehicles, its own war dead, widespread destruction and evidence of human rights abuses, including hundreds of civilian bodies on the streets in the town of Bucha.

As they retreated from Chernobyl, Russian troops blew up a bridge in the exclusion zone and planted a dense maze of anti-personnel mines, trip wires and booby traps around the defunct station. Two Ukrainian soldiers have stepped on mines in the past week, according to the Ukrainian government agency that manages the site.

In a bizarre final sign of the unit's misadventures, Ukrainian soldiers found discarded appliances and electronic goods on roads in the Chernobyl zone. These were apparently looted from towns deeper inside Ukraine and cast off for unclear reasons in the final retreat. Reporters found one washing machine on a road shoulder just outside the town of Chernobyl.

Employees of the exclusion zone management agency based in Chernobyl suffered under the Russian occupation, but nothing approaching the barbarity visited on civilians in Bucha and other towns around Kyiv by the Russian forces.

The Russians had come in seemingly endless columns on the first day of the war, said Natasha Siloshenko, 45, a cook at a cafeteria serving nuclear workers. She had watched, warily, from a side street.

"There was a sea of vehicles," she said. "They came in waves through the zone, driving fast toward Kyiv."

There was little or no combat in the zone, so far as she could tell. The armored columns merely passed through.

During the occupation, Russian soldiers searched the apartments of nuclear technicians and engineers, firefighters and support staff in the town of Chernobyl. "They took valuable items" from apartments, she said, but there was little violence.

Workers tried to caution the Russians about radiation risks, to little avail.

The background radiation in most of the 18-mile Exclusion Zone around the nuclear plant, after 36 years, poses scant risks and is about equivalent to a high-altitude airplane flight. But in invisible hot spots, some covering an acre or two, some just a few square yards, radiation can soar to thousands of times normal ambient levels.

A soldier in such a spot would be exposed every hour to what experts consider a safe limit for an entire year, said Mr. Chareyron, the nuclear expert. The most dangerous isotopes in the soil are Cesium 137, Strontium 90 and various isotopes of plutonium. Days or weeks spent in these areas bring a high risk of causing cancer, he said.

Throughout the zone, radioactive particles have settled into the soil to a depth of a few inches to a foot. They pose little threat if left underground, where their half-lives would tick by mostly harmlessly for decades or hundreds of years.

Until the Russian invasion, the main threat posed by this contamination was its absorption into mosses and trees that can burn in wildfires, disseminating the poisons in smoke, or through birds that eat radioactive, ground-dwelling insects.

“We told them, ‘This is the zone, you cannot go to certain places,’” Ms. Siloshenko said the workers had told the Russians. “They ignored us.”

At one dug-in position, Russian troops had burrowed a bunker from the sandy side of a road embankment and left heaps of trash — food wrappings, discarded boots, a blackened cooking pot — suggesting they had lived in the underground space for an extended time.

Nearby, a bulldozer had scraped away the topsoil to build berms for artillery emplacements and a half-dozen foxholes.

The forest around had recently burned, suggesting a fire had swept over the area during the Russian occupation, adding radioactive smoke to the exposure of the Russian soldiers, along with dust from disturbed ground.

The director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Mariano Grossi, issued a statement Thursday saying the agency had been unable to confirm reports of Russian soldiers sickened by radiation in the zone or to make an independent assessment of the radiation levels at the site. The agency’s automated radiation sensors in Chernobyl have been inoperable for more than a month, he said.

The Ukrainian government’s radiation monitors ceased working the first day of the war, said Kateryna Pavlova, a spokeswoman for the Ukrainian Chernobyl Zone Management Agency. Readings from satellites, she said, showed slightly elevated radiation in some areas after the Russian occupation.

Armored vehicles that run on treads, rather than wheels, pose the primary risk for radiation safety in a wider area, as they churn up the radioactive soil and spread it into areas of Belarus and Russia as they retreat, Ms. Pavlova said. “The next person who comes along can be contaminated,” she said.

While the five-day cutoff in electricity did not lead to any disasters, it was still cause for enormous anxiety among the plant’s operators, said Sergei Makluk, a shift supervisor interviewed at the nuclear station on Thursday evening.

The backup generators that kicked in require about 18,000 gallons of diesel fuel a day. In the first days, Russian officers assured plant employees that they would have enough fuel, drawn from the supplies being trucked in for armored vehicles in the fighting in the Kyiv suburbs, Mr. Makluk said. But by the fifth day, with the military’s well-documented logistical problems, the officers said they would no longer supply the diesel.

	<p>“They said, ‘There’s not enough fuel for the front,’” and that a power cable leading to Belarus should be used to draw electricity from the Belarusian grid to cool the waste pool instead.</p> <p>Mr. Simyonov, the chief safety engineer, characterized the threat to halt diesel supplies for generators as “blackmail” to force the authorities in Belarus to resolve the problem. However it happened, the electricity was restored in time and the nuclear fuel never came close to overheating.</p> <p>All in all, the trench digging and other dubious activities posed a far lower risk than the waste pool, and most of that to the Russian soldiers themselves, Mr. Simyonov said, adding wryly: “We invite them back to dig more trenches here, if they want.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 US-trained militaries in coups across Africa
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-africa-u-s-trained-militaries-are-ousting-civilian-governments-in-coups-11649505601?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>FORT BENNING, Ga.—A flurry of military coups across Africa has disrupted the U.S. strategy of enlisting local armies to counter Islamist extremists and other security threats.</p> <p>The U.S. has trained thousands of African soldiers, from infantrymen rehearsing counterterrorism raids on the edge of the Sahara to senior commanders attending the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. The programs are a linchpin of U.S. policy on the continent, intended to help African allies professionalize their armed forces to fight armed opponents both foreign and domestic.</p> <p>But U.S. commanders have watched with dismay over the past year as military leaders in several African allies—including officers with extensive American schooling—have overthrown civilian governments and seized power for themselves, triggering laws that forbid the U.S. government from providing them with weapons or training.</p> <p>“There’s no one more surprised or disappointed when partners that we’re working with—or have been working with for a while in some cases—decide to overthrow their government,” Rear Adm. Jamie Sands, commander of U.S. special-operations forces in Africa, said this week. “We have not found ourselves able to prevent it, and we certainly don’t assess that we’re causing it.”</p> <p>The strategic setback was apparent in recent weeks here at Fort Benning, where the U.S. Army hosted its annual gathering of top ground-force commanders from around Africa. Senior soldiers from three dozen African countries watched American recruits tackle boot-camp obstacle courses, witnessed parachute training and saw live-ammo tank and mortar demonstrations.</p> <p>The Army withheld invitations from coup leaders in Mali and Burkina Faso, West African countries engaged in existential struggles with al Qaeda and Islamic State. Guinean soldiers, who in September toppled the West African nation’s civilian government, were left out of the Fort Benning events and are no longer included in U.S.-led special-operations exercises.</p> <p>Sudan’s ruling junta, which last year reversed a U.S.-supported transition to democratic rule, was unwelcome at the Fort Benning summit. Ethiopia hosted the last such gathering in 2020; this year its military is on the outs with the U.S. over alleged human-rights abuses in its war against Tigrayan rebels.</p> <p>“We don’t control what happens when we leave,” said U.S. Army Col. Michael Sullivan, commander of the 2d Security Force Assistance Brigade, a unit created to advise and train African armies. “We always hope we’re helping countries do the right thing.”</p> <p>Last year, a logistics advisory team from Col. Sullivan’s brigade had just arrived in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia’s capital, and was waiting out its Covid-19 quarantine at a hotel when the Biden administration decided to cancel the deployment “due to our deep concerns about the conflict in northern Ethiopia and</p>

human-rights violations and abuses being committed against civilians,” according to a State Department spokesperson.

The advisers completed quarantine and left the country.

“I think everybody is hopeful they will turn the corner again and we’ll be able to work with our Ethiopian partners,” Col. Sullivan said.

Meanwhile, America’s Great Power rivals can seek to take advantage of the U.S. pullback.

Malian commandos attended U.S.-led special-operations exercises in Mauritania in 2020, but were cut off from American training after its military overthrew the president last May. The Malian junta hired Russian mercenaries from the Kremlin-linked Wagner Group to provide security.

The coup and the presence of the Russian agents led to a falling-out between Mali and France, the former colonial power in much of West Africa, and the announcement that Paris would withdraw thousands of troops that were in Mali fighting Islamic State and al Qaeda.

Human Rights Watch alleged this week that the Russians and their Malian allies rounded up and massacred roughly 300 civilian men—some suspected militants—in the town of Moura last month.

“The Malian government is responsible for this atrocity, the worst in Mali in a decade, whether carried out by Malian forces or associated foreign soldiers,” Corinne Dufka, a director of Human Rights Watch, said in a written release.

The Malian Defense Ministry reported that it had killed 203 “terrorists” in the operation and arrested 51 others, seizing weapons and ammunition. The military subsequently announced an investigation into the alleged massacre.

For years, the U.S. trained soldiers from Burkina Faso, which is facing waves of attacks from Islamic State fighters and a coalition of al Qaeda affiliates called Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin, or JNIM.

In 2019, Burkina Faso hosted 2,000 commandos from 32 African and Western countries for U.S.-led special-operations exercises, aimed at beefing up security in the Sahel, the semiarid strip just south of the Sahara.

In 2020, Lt. Col. Paul-Henri Damiba was among the Burkina Faso army contingent when the American-led exercises moved to Mauritania. Col. Damiba had previously attended a U.S.-sponsored military intelligence course in Senegal and a State Department peacekeeping-training program.

Early this year, the U.S. military was sufficiently concerned about the spread of militant violence in Burkina Faso to dispatch a Special Forces team to Ouagadougou, the capital city, to advise local commandos.

The Green Berets had just arrived when Burkina Faso soldiers, unhappy with the civilian government’s conduct of the war, surrounded the presidential palace, arrested President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, and announced that a military junta, the Patriotic Movement for Safeguarding and Restoration, would take power.

Eight days after the first burst of gunfire in front of the presidential palace, the junta named Col. Damiba president.

Instead of training local forces, the Green Berets reinforced security at the U.S. Embassy in Ouagadougou, in case the coup unleashed anti-American unrest. The U.S. also suspended work on plans to send one of Col. Sullivan’s advisory teams to the country.

Ghana, Ivory Coast, Benin and Togo dropped Burkina Faso from a joint task force being formed to prevent militants in the Sahel from pushing south toward the Gulf of Guinea—a prospect that alarms the Pentagon.

“Burkina was taken out because of the coup,” said Maj. Gen. Thomas Oppong-Peprah, Ghana’s army chief of staff.

American officers say their work with African counterparts routinely includes discussion of the importance of civilian control of the military and adherence to the rule of law.

“So these coups are completely opposite to everything that we’re teaching,” Adm. Sands, the special-operations commander, said in a call with reporters.

Still, Michael Shurkin, a former Central Intelligence Agency analyst, questioned whether American lectures can successfully counter the political pressures Africa armies can face amid fierce insurgencies, ethnic divisions and corrupt civilian governments.

“Why is a year at Fort Leavenworth going to change how you behave politically in your own country?” asked Mr. Shurkin, now with 14 North Strategies, an Africa-focused consulting firm. “It just doesn’t make sense to me.”

American Green Berets were in the midst of training Guinean special forces last year when the local soldiers broke away to oust the country’s civilian president. The coup leader, special forces Col. Mamady Doumbouya, had headed Guinea’s delegation to the 2019 American-led commando exercises in Burkina Faso.

When they realized they were at the center of an insurrection, the U.S. commandos took shelter at the U.S. Embassy in Conakry, Guinea’s capital. “At this time, the U.S. Africa Command has suspended all training with the Guinea military,” said a U.S. Africa Command spokeswoman.

Sudan, which had forsaken past ties with terror groups, begun a democratic opening and embarked on a sweeping rapprochement with the U.S., was invited to the U.S.-African army summit in 2020. But a military junta retook power last year and launched a bloody crackdown on protesters, losing its invitation to the Fort Benning event.

U.S. officers say they have no choice but to work with other militaries in global security missions; the U.S. practice is to fight its wars alongside allies. “Our intent is to continue to extend a hand to African nations to help them and really help them address some of the underlying causes of these coups,” said Adm. Sands.

Over the past 20 years, Fort Benning, which specializes in infantry, airborne and Ranger training, has hosted 1,650 soldiers from 37 African countries.

“The military should always collaborate,” said Maj. Gen. Chikunkha Harrison Soko, Malawi’s U.S.–trained land-force commander.

Insecurity in one part of the world quickly leaks into others, he said, through refugee flows and the spread of extremist ideologies. “What affects Europe, affects Africa,” Gen. Soko said. “What affects Africa, affects the whole of Europe.”

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HEADLINE	04/09 Nursing homes face rising number lawsuits
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/nursing-homes-face-growing-number-of-lawsuits-from-covid-19-fallout-11649507400?mod=hp_lead_pos5

Two years after the [coronavirus ravaged through nursing homes](#), families of residents who died from Covid-19 are bringing a wave of negligence and wrongful death lawsuits against the facilities.

The surge of suits, spurred by a [repeal of liability protections](#) and statutory deadlines to file the suits, largely accuses nursing homes of failing to properly curb the spread of disease, identify infected residents and treat their illnesses.

New York's nursing-home industry says much of the devastation wrought by the virus—particularly in the [chaotic early days of the pandemic](#)—was beyond its control, citing [staffing shortages](#), inadequate testing supplies, a lack of masks and other personal protective equipment and a controversial state policy requiring facilities [to admit residents who tested positive](#) for coronavirus.

In the early months of the pandemic, New York was the center of coronavirus infections, and [the state's nursing-home population was decimated](#). By May 2020, less than two months after the first presumed Covid-19 fatality at a New York nursing home, the pandemic had taken the lives of more than 6,500 facility residents, according to official tallies, a death toll much larger than state leaders [had initially acknowledged](#).

Dozens of lawsuits have been filed in New York over the past month, and it isn't the only hot spot of litigation. In Illinois, Levin & Perconti, a Chicago plaintiffs' firm focusing on nursing home and medical malpractice litigation, says it brought 78 cases in March alone.

"It's going to be a knock-down-drag-out battle," said Steven M. Levin, the founder and senior partner of the firm. "It's probably going to take years to get some of these cases to trial."

It is now up to courts to decide just how much blame should be laid on the owners of the facilities. Legal observers say it could be hard for the estates of deceased residents to prove a causal link between alleged lapses in infection control and the deaths of an aging, frail population.

Plaintiffs have notched some early victories that could make the lawsuits costlier to defend. A New York Supreme Court judge in Buffalo last month [declined to dismiss a lawsuit](#) against an Erie County nursing home, Humboldt House Rehabilitation and Nursing Center, brought by the sister of a 63-year-old resident who died of Covid-19 in April 2020.

The woman died days after New York enacted a health law that gave nursing homes and other healthcare facilities broad immunity from negligence lawsuits related to the pandemic. New York legislators eliminated the shield about a year later, but lawyers for Humboldt House argued in court that the repeal of the liability shield wasn't retroactive.

The judge disagreed with that interpretation, ruling that the law's legislative history made clear that the repeal was intended to be retroactive. "We have faith in the judicial process," said Mario C. Giannettino, an attorney for Humboldt House. He said staff at the facility "risked and sacrificed their lives in a time of international crisis."

Joseph L. Ciaccio, a New York malpractice attorney representing the administrator of the deceased woman's estate, said his law firm, Napoli Shkolnik PLLC, has brought 48 lawsuits against nursing homes, filing most of the cases in the past month. Before pursuing litigation, the firm had to procure medical records and wait for the appointment of estate administrators to act as legal representatives on behalf of heirs of the decedent. He also faced a time constraint. In New York, like in many states, the statute of limitations for wrongful death claims is two years from the date of death.

"We're trying to preserve the claims for our clients before running out of time," said Mr. Ciaccio.

He also is seeking to coordinate pretrial proceedings of Covid-related nursing-home claims before a single court. Nursing homes have objected to such consolidation.

	<p>Few of the cases in New York have progressed beyond early briefing stages. Whether plaintiffs will eventually recover damages remains uncertain.</p> <p>Nina Kohn, an elder-law scholar at Syracuse University College of Law, said plaintiffs could have trouble showing that a nursing home's actions were responsible for a resident's death "because the virus is so easily transmissible without contact."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Covid test costs getting harder to cover
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-tests-are-easier-to-find-covering-their-cost-is-getting-more-complicated-11649496609?mod=hp_lead_pos4
GIST	<p>Some Americans are having a harder time getting the cost of their Covid-19 tests covered as some government-funded efforts wind down.</p> <p>The state of play reflects the transition by many governments and businesses from treating Covid-19 as an immediate crisis to a part of daily life that must be managed. Health experts say obstacles to testing could hinder tracking and treatment going forward, particularly for the uninsured.</p> <p>Covid-19 tests, both lab-based and over-the-counter, are now generally available in the U.S., as reported cases and hospitalizations remain relatively low. It is a reversal from this winter when people waited hours at testing sites and faced empty pharmacy shelves during the Omicron surge. Some paid hundreds of dollars out of pocket for tests.</p> <p>Federal and local health authorities enacted policies throughout the pandemic to reduce the cost of Covid-19 tests on patients, most recently for those that are home-based. Earlier this week, Medicare started covering as many as eight over-the-counter tests a month for many enrolled seniors at certain pharmacies and health providers.</p> <p>At least one government policy expanding test access was discontinued in March. That has meant more people, primarily those without insurance, must pay for their tests, while many with insurance are being asked to pay upfront and apply for reimbursement later. A report by Kaiser found that in January about half of insurers with at least one million enrollees required customers to go through reimbursement procedures.</p> <p>"There are many options out there and it's legitimately confusing," said Cynthia Cox, vice president at the Kaiser Family Foundation and director for the program on the Affordable Care Act. "With cost barriers as well, that might mean worse data."</p> <p>The White House said last month that because of a lack of funds, it would wind down a federal program that reimburses providers for virus-related care for the uninsured. Many state and local health departments have been shutting down testing sites, citing both waning demand and an overall shift to over-the-counter testing.</p> <p>Utah, for example, is closing its free state-sponsored testing sites and will no longer provide free travel testing, as part of a transition to a new phase in the pandemic response that reflects the availability of vaccines, tests and treatments, according to Leisha Nolen, state epidemiologist at the Utah Department of Health.</p> <p>As of March 31, U.S. laboratories were processing about 716,000 mostly PCR tests a day, down from a peak of 2.5 million at the height of this winter's surge, according to federal data. About 3% of those tests came back positive, down from more than a quarter in January.</p> <p>Some laboratories and healthcare centers, including CityMD and Quest Diagnostics, have since said that people without insurance will now be charged for tests; a PCR lab-based test can cost upward of \$100 a test.</p>

Worksite Labs, which operated free community testing sites in New York and California for primarily uninsured and underinsured patients, has gone from testing about 100 people a day to fewer than 10 on average since the government funding ended and the company started charging for tests, according to Lindsay Williams, chief clinical officer at Worksite Labs.

Some doctors say limiting upfront free testing for Covid-19 could cause uninsured patients to avoid getting tested at all, risking further virus spread. It also could make it harder to provide them [Covid-19 treatments](#), some of which need to be administered within days of getting symptoms to be most effective, they said.

“They might not get these lifesaving treatments because they’ll wait a week, and then the window to get those treatments will have closed,” said Kami Kim, an infectious-disease specialist at the University of South Florida and Tampa General Hospital.

Options remain for people to get tests at no cost, including health department-run sites and some select pharmacies. The federal government has delivered nearly 250 million [free, at-home Covid-19 tests](#) to households across the U.S., about half of the 500 million tests it initially pledged to mail to Americans. Households can order two rounds of four tests online from the federal government.

People with private insurance, as well as those on Medicaid and Medicare, are still able to get full coverage for diagnostic Covid-19 tests ordered by a health provider. Private insurers have also had to cover a certain number of at-home, over-the-counter tests for patients starting in January, with the policy expanding to Medicare this month.

The expanded policy is the [first time Medicare has covered](#) an over-the-counter test at no cost, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Consumers often pay for over-the-counter tests for pregnancy or blood-sugar monitoring out of pocket.

Prices for at-home antigen tests that hunt for virus proteins range from about \$8 to \$40 for a single test. Many are sold in kits of two for around \$24 a kit. The PCR-like tests, which look for the virus’s genetic material and are often more sensitive, are more expensive, at about \$75 a test.

Carla DeLancy, a Denver retiree, said she spent \$400 on eight at-home Covid-19 tests for herself and her husband in January after the Biden administration said private insurers would begin covering the cost of tests.

Her insurer, Government Employees Health Association Inc., initially told her she would be reimbursed for the full amount. She received \$96. Under the White House plan implemented in January, insurers are able to limit reimbursements for tests purchased outside of their network to \$12 per test.

Ms. DeLancy said the insurer has agreed to eventually reimburse her in full. “All these things are falling between the cracks,” she said.

The insurer said it is working to ensure customers who bought tests before the limit was implemented receive a full refund.

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HEADLINE	04/09 Oligarchs’ private jets find refuge in Dubai
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-oligarchs-private-jets-find-refuge-in-dubai-but-cant-leave-11649496610?mod=hp_lead_pos8
GIST	DUBAI—When the U.S. and Europe launched sanctions against Russia and its elite over the war in Ukraine, oligarchs scrambled to find a haven for their private jets. They are flocking to Dubai, but once they get here, they effectively can’t leave.

Dozens of private jets connected to Russia's wealthy are sitting on the tarmac at a terminal in the desert, part of a buildup of more than 100 planes at the airport since Russia's invasion on Feb. 24, according to jet-industry executives, satellite images and data from aviation research firm WINGX.

The United Arab Emirates, which counts Dubai as its most populous city, has become one of the most attractive places to park private jets and other movable assets [such as superyachts](#) because it has largely avoided public criticism of Russia and hasn't said it would enforce sanctions imposed by Western capitals. Instead, the Persian Gulf state has [called for a diplomatic solution](#) in Ukraine, saying that taking sides would lead to more violence.

"All the Russians have moved their airplanes to Dubai because Dubai isn't part of the sanctions," said Alireza Ittihadieh, chief executive of London-based aircraft broker Freestream Aircraft Ltd.

The world's [best-known Russian oligarch](#), Roman Abramovich, flew his \$250 million [Boeing](#) Co. 787 Dreamliner into Dubai on March 4, its last known location, according to tracking site Flightradar24. The plane is designed for 250 passengers.

The last known location of a Gulfstream G650ER, which website SuperYacht Fan says is owned by sanctioned steel tycoon Viktor Rashnikov, was in the U.A.E. It is also the last-known flight-radar location for an Embraer SA jet connected with sanctioned businessman Mikhail Gutseriev and a Bombardier Inc. BD700 Global Express associated with Arkady Rotenberg, a sanctioned entrepreneur and former judo partner of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The cost of parking at Dubai's Al Maktoum International, the busiest private jet terminal in the U.A.E., is roughly \$1,000 a day, according to another person familiar with the pricing.

Western governments, by contrast, have frozen the assets of sanctioned individuals indefinitely, without having to prove criminality.

A Bombardier Global 6500 private jet that the U.K. government said was connected to oil tycoon Eugene Shvidler was scheduled to fly from London to Dubai on March 8. But the plane never made the flight and was detained by U.K. authorities, who also sanctioned the businessman, a close associate of Mr. Abramovich.

A spokesman for Mr. Abramovich didn't respond to a request for comment. Spokespeople for Magnitogorsk Iron & Steel Works, which Mr. Rashnikov chairs; SFI Investment Holding, connected to Mr. Gutseriev's family; and Stroygazmontazh, which Mr. Rotenberg founded, didn't respond to requests for comment on their behalf.

Sanctions haven't only targeted Russian oligarchs directly to exert pressure on the Russian leader to change course in Ukraine. They have also [hit the broader aviation sector](#) and affected regular Russians owning planes or chartering them from European private-jet operators.

Those sanctions have largely meant that once Russian jet owners get their planes to Dubai, they can't fly them anywhere else, according to aviation lawyers and private jet brokers.

The U.S. and EU have [prohibited companies from insuring aircraft owned by Russians](#) or offering services such as fleet management, repair and maintenance. Most aircraft owned by Russians are insured by London firms and managed by European companies that will now have to rethink their commercial relationship with Russians, lawyers and industry executives said.

"A lot of the Russian-related airplanes have moved to the U.A.E. because you can fly in the airspace there," said Steve Varsano, chief executive of the Jet Business, a London-based sales broker for private aircraft. "But once you get there you're pretty much grounded because you can't maintain the airplanes."

Boeing, a producer of private jets and the main source of maintenance for most owners, [said it won't support any aircraft](#) owned or connected to sanctioned Russians, meaning the jurisdictions where the aircraft are registered are likely to deem the jets unairworthy because they can't get manufacturer support, according to aviation lawyers and private jet executives. Some aircraft registries, such as the Isle of Man in the British Isles, have said they are deregistering jets linked to politically exposed Russians, meaning the planes will likely have to be registered elsewhere before they can fly again.

The U.S. Commerce Department has threatened jail time and fines for "any person anywhere, including within Russia" if they violate sanctions on aircraft.

In total, 30 private jets with their home base in Russia were parked at Dubai's airports as of April 6, most for more than seven days, according to Hamburg-based WINGX, the research firm. It defines an aircraft's homebase as the country from where the jet flew the most in a year, rather than where it is registered.

Another 90 aircraft were parked in Dubai that are registered around the world. It couldn't be determined how many of those are connected to Russians and how many are being used by non-Russian visitors to Dubai.

Satellite images taken by U.S.-based Planet Labs PBC show a gradual buildup of private jets from Feb. 16 to April 3.

An official for the U.A.E. civil-aviation authority said it is a regular practice for private jet owners to park their aircraft at a convenient airport when not flying. Spokespeople for Dubai Airports, which runs airports in the emirate, and the Dubai Media Office didn't respond to requests for comment.

Other airspaces that remain open to Russians also have private jets parked there, according to WINGX. There are 54 in Istanbul, six of which have a home base in Russia, and another two Russia-linked private jets are in Tbilisi, Georgia, the research firm said.

At least three private jets in Dubai were being repossessed by banks as the owners can't pay the mortgages due to sanctions, said Mr. Ittihadieh of Freestream Aircraft.

Mr. Abramovich's 787 Dreamliner would be difficult to sell and likely will remain in Dubai until Ukraine conflict ends and sanctions against Russian oligarchs are reconsidered, Mr. Ittihadieh said.

Few firms are willing to explore buying a Russian-owned or -linked private jet because the ambiguity created by sanctions means people are afraid of blowback from European or U.S. authorities, Mr. Ittihadieh added.

"Right now they are all door stoppers—nobody will want to deal with them," he said.

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HEADLINE	04/08 UN: food prices at highest ever levels
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/apr/08/global-food-prices-rise-to-highest-ever-levels-after-russian-invasion-ukraine-wheat
GIST	<p>Global food prices rose to their highest ever levels in March as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the UN has reported.</p> <p>Cooking oils, cereals and meats hit all-time highs and meant food commodities cost a third more than the same time last year, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization's monthly food price index published on Friday.</p> <p>The Russia-Ukraine war has disrupted Black Sea exports of crucial commodities from a region that had been producing more than a quarter of the world's wheat exports.</p>

The war has helped push cereal prices up 17% over the past month with the closure of ports throttling wheat and maize exports from Ukraine. Russian exports have also been slowed by financial and shipping problems.

World wheat prices soared by 19.7% during March, while maize prices posted a 19.1% month-on-month increase, hitting a record high along with those of barley and sorghum.

The FAO said these problems were likely to persist, leading to higher prices, lower stocks and uncertainty in the wheat market in the future.

“The higher price quotations are particularly concerning for countries already struggling with other crisis, including conflict, natural disasters, economic conditions or, as it is often the case, some combinations of those,” said an FAO spokesperson, adding that countries with low incomes and food shortages may struggle to pay higher prices.

“[Price] increases are the most noticeable in the countries where the share in disposable income spent on food is the highest. In these cases, the most vulnerable are likely to skip meals, purchase less nutritious foods, or use other coping strategies, which will have longer term effects on their health and wellbeing.”

Joseph Glauber, senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute, said before the invasion, prices were already near record highs because of limited global supplies.

“Projected stock levels were already low relative to recent years, which means that there are few supplies available to buffer the impacts of reduced exports coming from the Black Sea,” he said.

IFPRI estimates that Ukraine and Russia accounted for 12% of calories traded in the world.

Glauber said the volatility in food prices was being felt everywhere. Countries that were particularly reliant on wheat from Russia and Ukraine may have to switch to the EU, US, Australia, Canada and Argentina for wheat supplies.

“Many of these countries are in north Africa and the Middle East where wheat often accounts for as much as 35% of total calories consumed and a majority of the wheat is imported, much from the Black Sea,” he said.

The Black Sea region has also been a crucial source for sunflower oil and the limiting of exports has meant vegetable oil prices rising by almost a quarter since February. Prices also rose for palm, soy and rapeseed oils because of increased demand.

Earlier this week, the World Food Programme said the effect of blocked exports would hit several countries in east Africa, including Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and South Sudan – countries already experiencing severe drought and conflict.

WFP said the price of local foods had risen a quarter, on average, compared with last year but had been as high as 92% in Sudan.

It also warned that eastern African countries are fully dependent on imports for fertiliser, for which Ukraine and Russia are also a key source, and that disruption could impact local production and push food prices even further up.

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HEADLINE	04/09 Experts concerns: evolution Covid variants
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/09/covid-evolution-next-variations-mutations-science-fears

GIST

As the BA.2 wave reaches its peak in the UK and begins subsiding in some European countries, US health officials are looking to an uncertain future even as American lawmakers have delayed renewing funds to address the pandemic.

While the Omicron subvariant now makes up an estimated 72% of Covid cases, the US has not seen a country-wide increase in cases. Covid hospitalizations are now at the lowest point of the pandemic.

But scientists warned this week that the coronavirus will continue evolving to evade immunity, causing future surges that will be difficult to predict.

Covid-19 has evolved faster than expected, and “we should expect a lot of evolution going forward,” Trevor Bedford, a professor of biostatistics at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center, told a panel of independent FDA advisers on Wednesday. “Those viruses will do better and will spread locally and perhaps regionally and perhaps globally.”

The US has generally followed surges in the UK three or four weeks later, but reported cases are holding steady at an average of about 26,000 a day. Although deaths have declined significantly from the Omicron peak, more than 500 Americans are still dying every day.

“I think we are going to see some rising cases in some places,” said Benjamin Linas, professor at the Boston University School of Medicine. Lifting precautions will probably result in future upticks, he and others wrote in a study published earlier this month.

“We’re not in the crisis that we were back in 2020, but we need to be realistic that we’re also not completely over and done,” Linas said.

Some regions in the north-east, including New York and Massachusetts, are beginning to see ticks upward. Philadelphia is considering a return to indoor masking next week.

In Washington DC, where confirmed cases have increased by 135% in the past two weeks, several high-level politicians have tested positive, including the House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, on Thursday.

It’s difficult to parse the extent to which surges elsewhere have been driven by changes in behavior, BA.2’s increased transmissibility, and waning immunity, and whether factors in the US could suppress such a wave.

As the pandemic wears on, changes to how cases are reported and counted may also cloud the picture.

Home tests are frequently not counted in official tallies, making it increasingly difficult to understand how widespread infections are. Wastewater monitoring could be useful to fill in the gaps, but many places are still ramping up such programs.

Several states have moved to weekly or twice-weekly, instead of daily, reporting of cases, mirroring a similar shift in June 2021 during a lull before the Delta surge. Oklahoma is changing how it reports its seven-day average of cases.

Changes to definitions of Covid hospitalizations and deaths may also complicate pandemic tracking.

Some states have also narrowed their definitions of Covid hospitalization to focus only on patients receiving Covid-specific medications, while others have changed how they define Covid deaths.

Last Monday, US lawmakers reached a deal for \$10bn in Covid funding, some of which has already lapsed. But on Thursday, several senators confirmed that the vote will not take place until after the upcoming two-week spring break.

This amount was lower than the \$15bn previously cut from an omnibus spending bill or the \$22.5bn requested by the White House.

The new bill will not cover tests and treatments for those without insurance, who lost that coverage in March. More than 30 million Americans aren't insured, and the lack of affordable, accessible testing and treatments could further affect the country's ability to track and address cases and severe illness.

The new funding package would also cut spending for global Covid campaigns, including vaccination, which could prolong the pandemic by allowing new variants to emerge and spread.

"This is a global health problem, and if we continue to cut the budget for vaccines in developing countries, we're going to get the next Omicron," Linas said. "Because we have these pockets where the virus goes to reproduce, it's already extended the epidemic by at least a year – and if it keeps on happening, we're going to chase our tail indefinitely."

An estimated half of Americans may have been infected with Omicron in a 10-week period – a "remarkable number", Bedford said. In comparison, influenza usually infects perhaps 10-20% of the population in about 20 weeks.

But that would also mean that about half of Americans weren't infected in the first Omicron wave, potentially leaving them vulnerable to another surge now. The coronavirus, as it swept the globe and infected millions, mutated two to 10 times faster than influenza usually does, Bedford said.

It's likely that future variants will still emerge from Omicron, even overcoming immunity from previous cases of Omicron, he added.

But there's also the potential for the wildcard emergence of a new variant from a previous strain, like Delta. Omicron seems to have evolved from a much earlier version of the virus in summer 2020 before exploding across the globe in late 2021.

It's also difficult to understand if Covid-19 will eventually become a seasonal virus, like influenza or respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

"It's not clear to me that it's actually tied to the months of the year, or if that's just confounded by the virology that's been happening," Linas said. Influenza, for example, is "highly seasonal" but "I don't think we know that yet about Sars-CoV-2."

One major treatment has been halted in the US amid questions of its efficacy. The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) pulled its authorization of sotrovimab, a monoclonal antibody, as studies reveal it is less likely to be effective against Omicron. Recent research also indicates that this treatment might create resistance – a major concern with other monoclonal antibodies and antivirals.

Vaccines and treatments help, but they aren't sufficient to halt the pandemic on their own, and they must be accompanied by measures like ventilation and masking during times of high transmission, Linas said.

Surges are also highly dependent on human behavior.

"There is no virus epidemic outside the context of the way people behave," Linas said. "It would be a big mistake to let off on ourselves and our leaders ... The actions we take or don't take matter a ton."

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HEADLINE	04/09 Understanding Vladimir Putin: fooled world
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/09/understanding-vladimir-putin-the-man-who-fooled-the-world
GIST	Vladimir Putin was annoyed – or maybe just bored. The Russian leader had been patiently fielding questions from a small group of international journalists in the restaurant of a modest hotel in Davos. Then

one of the queries seemed to irritate him. He stared back at the questioner, an American, and said slowly, through an interpreter: “I’ll answer that question in a minute. But first let me ask you about the extraordinary ring you have on your finger.”

All heads in the room swivelled. “Why is the stone so large?” Putin continued. A few of the audience began to giggle and the journalist looked uncomfortable. Putin took on a tone of mock sympathy and continued: “You surely don’t mind me asking, because you wouldn’t be wearing something like that unless you were trying to draw attention to yourself?” There was more laughter. By now, the original question had been forgotten. It was a masterclass in distraction and bullying.

The year was 2009, and Putin had already been in power for almost a decade. But this was my first encounter with him in the flesh, during his visit to the World Economic Forum. Putin’s ability to radiate menace, without raising his voice, was striking. But so was the laughter of his audience. Despite the violence of his Russian government – as demonstrated in Chechnya and Georgia – western opinion-formers were still inclined to treat him as a pantomime villain.

I was reminded of this just before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. In a televised meeting at the Kremlin with his closest advisers, Putin toyed with Sergei Naryshkin, the head of his foreign intelligence service – making the feared securocrat look like a stuttering fool. The pleasure he took in humiliating somebody in front of an audience was once again on display. But this time, nobody was laughing. Putin was about to plunge Europe into its biggest land war since 1945. Russian troops launched a full-scale invasion on 24 February. Within a month, more than 10 million Ukrainians had fled their homes, thousands of troops and civilians had been killed and the coastal city of Mariupol had been destroyed.

Even though western intelligence services had warned for months that Russia was poised to attack, many experienced Putin-watchers, both in Russia and the west, refused to believe it. After more than 20 years of his leadership, they felt that they understood Putin. He was ruthless and violent, no doubt, but he was also believed to be rational, calculating and committed to Russia’s integration into the world economy. Few believed he was capable of such a reckless gamble.

Looking back, however, it is clear that the outside world has consistently misread him. From the moment he took power, outsiders too often saw what they wanted and played down the darkest sides of Putinism.

In fact, the outside world’s indulgence of Putin went much further than simply turning a blind eye to his excesses. For a rising generation of strongman leaders and cultural conservatives outside Russia, Putin became something of a hero and a role model. As his admirers saw it, the Russian leader had inherited a country humiliated by the breakup of the Soviet Union. Through strength and cunning, he had restored its status and global power, and even regained some of the territory lost when the USSR broke up. And he had delighted nationalists and populists the world over by successfully defying self-righteous American liberals such as Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Dmitry Peskov, Putin’s spokesman, was not simply spouting propaganda when he said in 2018: “There’s a demand in the world for special, sovereign leaders, for decisive ones ... Putin’s Russia was the starting point.”

The Putin fanclub has had numerous members in the west over the years. Rudy Giuliani, President Trump’s close adviser and lawyer, expressed admiration for Putin’s annexation of Crimea, remarking: “He makes a decision and he executes it, quickly. That’s what you call a leader.” Nigel Farage, the former leader of Ukip and the Brexit party, and a friend of Donald Trump, once named Putin the world leader he most admired, adding: “The way he played the whole Syria thing. Brilliant. Not that I approve of him politically.” Matteo Salvini, the leader of the populist right Northern League party and a former deputy prime minister of Italy, flaunted his admiration for the Russian leader by being photographed in a Putin T-shirt in Red Square. Rodrigo Duterte, the president of the Philippines, has said, “My favourite hero is Putin.”

Most important of all, Xi Jinping is also a confirmed admirer. A week after being appointed as president of China in early 2013, Xi made his first state visit overseas – choosing to visit Putin in Moscow. On 4 February 2022, just 20 days before the invasion of Ukraine, Putin met Xi in Beijing for their 38th summit

meeting. Shortly afterwards, Russia and China announced a “no limits” partnership. As the joint Russian-Chinese statement made clear, the two leaders are united in their hostility to American global power and to the pro-democracy “colour revolutions” they accuse Washington of stirring up around the world – from Ukraine to Hong Kong. Putin and Xi are both strongman rulers who have centralised power around themselves and encouraged a cult of personality. They are, as Alexander Gabuev, a Russian academic, puts it, “the tsar and the emperor”. Whether this partnership of strongmen will survive the Russian invasion of Ukraine is now one of the most important questions in international politics.

Putin was sworn into office as president of Russia on 31 December 1999. But at first it was not obvious that he would last very long in the job, let alone that he would emerge as the most aggressive challenger to the western liberal order and the pioneer of a new model of authoritarian leadership. As the chaotic Yeltsin era of the 1990s drew to a close, Putin’s ascent to the top job was eased by his former colleagues in the KGB. But he also had the approval of Russia’s richest and most powerful people, the oligarchs, who saw him as a capable administrator and “safe pair of hands” who would not threaten established interests.

Viewed from the west, Putin looked relatively reassuring. In his first televised speech from the Kremlin, given on New Year’s Eve 1999, just a few hours after taking over from Yeltsin, Putin promised to “protect freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, freedom of the mass media, ownership rights, these fundamental elements of a civilised society”. In March 2000, he won his first presidential election and proudly asserted: “We have proved that Russia is becoming a modern democratic state.” When Bill Clinton met Putin in the Kremlin for the first time, in June 2000, he declared his Russian counterpart “fully capable of building a prosperous, strong Russia, while preserving freedom and pluralism and the rule of law”.

Yet while Putin may initially have found it convenient to use the rhetoric of liberal democracy, his early actions as president told a different story. In his first year in office, he moved immediately to rein in independent sources of power, to assert the central authority of the state and to use warfare to bolster his own personal position – all actions that were to become hallmarks of Putinism. The escalation of the war in Chechnya made Putin seem like a nationalist hero, standing up for Russian interests and protecting the ordinary citizen from terrorism. In an early move that alarmed liberals, the new president reinstated the old Soviet national anthem. His promises to protect media freedom turned out to be empty: Russia’s few independent television networks were brought under government control.

As Putin established himself in office, the image-makers got to work crafting a strongman persona for him. Gleb Pavlovsky, one of Putin’s first spin doctors, later described him as a “quick learner” and a “talented actor”. Key images were placed in the Russian media and around the world: Putin on horseback, Putin practising judo, Putin arm-wrestling or strolling bare-chested by a river in Siberia. These photographs attracted mockery from intellectuals and cynics. But the president’s handlers were clear-eyed. As Pavlovsky later told the Washington Post, the goal was to ensure that “Putin corresponds ideally to the Hollywood image of a saviour-hero”.

In any case, Russians were more than ready for a strongman to ride to their rescue. The collapse of the Soviet system in 1991 had allowed for the emergence of democracy and freedom of speech. But as the economy atrophied and then fell apart, many experienced a severe drop in living standards and personal security. By 1999, life expectancy for Russian men had fallen by three and a half years to below 60. A UN report attributed this to a “rise in self-destructive behaviour”, which it linked to “rising poverty rates, unemployment and financial insecurity”. Under those circumstances, a decisive leader who promised to turn back the clock had real appeal.

Long before Trump promised to “make America great again”, Putin was promising to bring back the stability and pride of the Soviet era to those Russians who had lost out in the 1990s. But his nostalgia was not restricted to the social cohesion of Soviet times. Putin also yearned to restore some of the USSR’s lost international clout. In a speech in 2005, Putin labelled the collapse of the Soviet Union “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century”. As the years have passed, he has become increasingly preoccupied by Russian history. In the summer of 2021, he published a long essay entitled *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians* – which, even at the time, some saw as a manifesto for

invasion. Delving through centuries of history, Putin attempted to prove that Ukraine was an artificial state and that “Russia was robbed, indeed” when Ukraine gained independence in 1991.

Fyodor Lukyanov, an academic who is close to the Russian leader, told me in 2019 that one of Putin’s enduring fears was the loss of Russia’s status as one of the world’s great powers for the first time in centuries. His resentment at what he regarded as American slights and betrayals set Putin on a collision course with the west. A landmark moment came with a speech he gave at the Munich Security Conference in 2007.

That speech was a direct challenge to the west and an expression of cold fury. He accused the US of an “almost uncontained hyper use of force – military force – in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts”. The Putin of 2000, who had expressed pride at Russia’s transformation into a modern democracy, had given way to a man who denounced western talk of freedom and democracy as a hypocritical front for power politics.

The Munich speech was not just an angry reflection on the past. It also pointed the way to the future. The Russian president had put the west on notice that he intended to fight back against the US-led world order. It foreshadowed a lot of what was to come: Russia’s military intervention in Georgia in 2008, its annexation of Crimea in 2014, its dispatch of troops to Syria in 2015, its meddling in the US presidential election of 2016. All of these actions burnished Putin’s reputation as a nationalist and a strong leader. They also made him an icon for strongmen throughout the world who rejected western leadership and the “liberal international order”.

This indictment of the west goes back to the 1990s. It is argued repeatedly in Moscow that the expansion of Nato to take in countries of the former Soviet empire (including Poland and the Baltic states) was a direct contradiction of promises made after the end of the cold war. Nato’s intervention in the Kosovo war of 1998-9 added to the list of grievances proving, in the Kremlin’s eyes, both that Nato is an aggressor and that western talk of respecting sovereignty and state borders was nothing but hypocrisy. Russians were not reassured by the western riposte that Nato was acting in response to ethnic cleansing and human rights abuses by Serbia. As one liberal Russian politician put it to me in 2008, in a moment of frankness: “We know we have committed human rights abuses in Chechnya. If Nato can bomb Belgrade for that, why could they not bomb Moscow?”

Putin’s case against Nato also takes in the Iraq war launched by the US and many of its allies in 2003. For him, the massive bloodshed in Iraq was proof that the west’s self-proclaimed pursuit of “democracy and freedom” only brings instability and suffering in its wake. If you mention the brutal behaviour of Russian forces in Chechnya or Syria in Moscow, you will always have the Iraq war thrown back in your face.

Crucially, the west’s promotion of democracy has posed a direct threat to Putin’s own political and personal survival. From 2003 to 2005, pro-democracy “colour revolutions” broke out in many of the states of the former Soviet Union – including Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. If demonstrators in Independence Square in Kyiv could bring down an autocratic government in Ukraine, what was to stop the same happening in Red Square? In Russia, many believed it was a “fairytale” that these were spontaneous uprisings. As a former intelligence operative whose entire professional career had involved running “black operations”, Putin was particularly inclined to see the CIA as pulling the strings. The goal, as the Kremlin saw it, was to install pro-western puppet regimes. Russia itself could be next.

The shock of the Iraq war and the colour revolutions were the recent experiences that informed Putin’s Munich speech in 2007. And, as the Kremlin saw it, this pattern of western misdeeds continued. Putin points to the western powers’ 2011 intervention in Libya that resulted in the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi – something he believes they had promised they would not do.

That episode is a particularly sore spot for Putin, since it took place during the four years from 2008 to 2012 when he was serving in the lesser job of prime minister, having stepped aside as president in favour of his acolyte Dmitry Medvedev. As Putin’s supporters see it, a naive Medvedev was duped into supporting a UN resolution that allowed for a limited intervention, only for western powers to exceed their

mandate in order to overthrow and kill Gaddafi. They have no time for the response that the Libyan intervention was made on human rights grounds, but that events then took on a life of their own, as the Libyan rebellion gained steam.

Medvedev's alleged naivety in allowing the Libyan intervention proved useful for Putin, however: it established the idea that he was indispensable as Russia's leader. Any substitute, even one chosen by Putin, would leave the country vulnerable to a scheming and ruthless west. In 2011, Putin announced that he intended to return as president, after the potential presidential term had been extended to two consecutive periods of six years. This announcement provoked rare public demonstrations in Moscow and other cities, which again fanned Putin's fears about western schemes to undermine his power. I was in Moscow in January 2012 and witnessed the marches and banners, some of which carried pointed references to Gaddafi's fate. Putin understood the parallels. He commented publicly about how disgusted he had been by the footage of Gaddafi's murder – which perhaps reflected a certain concern about his own potential fate. The fact that Hillary Clinton, then America's Secretary of State, expressed public support for the 2012 demonstrations was deeply resented by Putin and may have justified, in his mind, Russia's efforts to undermine Clinton's presidential campaign in 2016.

Putin secured his re-election, but his sense that the west remained a threat to Russia was further stoked by events in Ukraine in 2013-14. The prospect of that country signing an association agreement with the European Union was seen as a serious threat in the Kremlin, since it would pull Russia's most important neighbour – once an integral part of the USSR – into the west's sphere of influence. Under pressure from Moscow, the Ukrainian government of President Viktor Yanukovich reversed course. But this provoked another popular uprising in Kyiv, forcing Yanukovich to flee. The loss of a compliant ally in Kyiv was a major geopolitical reverse for the Kremlin.

Putin's response was to dramatically raise the stakes, by crossing the line into the use of military force. In February 2014, Russia invaded and annexed Crimea, a region that was part of Ukraine but had belonged to Russia until 1954 and was populated largely by Russian-speakers. It was also, by agreement with the Ukrainians, the home of Russia's Black Sea fleet. In the west, the annexation of Crimea, along with Russian military intervention in eastern Ukraine, was seen as a flagrant violation of international law that many feared could be the prelude to further acts of aggression.

But in Russia, the annexation was widely greeted as a triumph – it represented the nation's fightback. Putin's approval ratings in independent opinion polls soared to over 80%. In the immediate afterglow, he came closer to achieving the ultimate goal of the strongman ruler: the complete identification of the nation with the leader. Vyacheslav Volodin, the speaker of the Russian parliament, exulted: "If there's Putin, there's Russia. If there's no Putin, there's no Russia." Putin himself crowed that Crimea had been taken without a shot being fired.

The west's response was to slap economic sanctions on Russia. But western indignation did not last long. Four years later, Russia hosted a successful World Cup. At the final, Putin sat with the presidents of France and Croatia, two EU nations, in the VIP box in Moscow.

The ease with which Putin annexed Crimea – and the swiftness with which the west seemed prepared to forgive – may have laid the ground for an unjustified confidence that led to the invasion of Ukraine. His overreach is also a reminder of the flaws in the strongman model of leadership. Decades in office can cause a leader to succumb to megalomania or paranoia. The elimination of checks and balances, the centralisation of power and the promotion of a cult of personality make it more likely that a leader will make a disastrous mistake. For all these reasons, strongman rule is an inherently flawed and dangerous model of government.

Tragically, that lesson is being learned all over again – in Russia and Ukraine. An invasion that was meant to secure Russia's place as a great power and Putin's place in history has clearly gone wrong. Putin is now involved in a brutal war of attrition. Western sanctions will see the Russian economy shrink dramatically this year, and the Russian middle-class is witnessing the disappearance of many of the consumer goods and travel opportunities that emerged with the end of the cold war.

	<p>The unofficial goal of western policy is clearly to force Putin from power. But the endgame may not come as swiftly as we would like. Deeply entrenched in his decades-long mission, Putin is now even less likely to give up power voluntarily, since his successors might repudiate his policies, or even put him on trial.</p> <p>The prospects for popular uprising are equally poor, despite the many brave Russians who have indicated their disgust over the war. Any protests are likely to be swiftly crushed with violence and imprisonment, as they were in neighbouring Belarus in 2020 and 2021. A third scenario – the possibility of an enlightened group within the elite seizing power – seems out of reach, too. Organising a palace coup against Putin will be very difficult: all dissenters were purged from the Kremlin long ago. Putin also takes his personal security very seriously: several of his former bodyguards have become rich in their own right. While there will be many within Russia who are dismayed by the course that events have taken, orchestrating that diffuse discontent into a coherent plot looks like a formidable challenge.</p> <p>The difficult truth is that Putin’s strongman style has defined his rule over Russia – and despite his many crimes and misdemeanours, those same strongman tactics may preserve him in power for years to come.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Day 45 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/09/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-45-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has described a missile strike on a railway station in eastern Ukraine as a Russian war crime and called for a “firm global response”. At least 52 people, including five children, were killed in the missile strike on Kramatorsk train station. The US believes Russia used a short range ballistic missile on the train station. Russia has denied responsibility. • Ten humanitarian corridors have been agreed for Saturday for people from besieged regions, including the city of Mariupol, according to Ukraine’s deputy prime minister Iryna Vereshchuk. The governor of Luhansk earlier called for more evacuations, warning that shelling had increased over recent days and that more Russian troops had arrived in the region. • Russian air activity is expected to increase in the south and east of Ukraine, according to the UK’s Ministry of Defence, which said Russian operations continue to focus on the Russian-controlled territories in Donbas, as well as Mariupol and Mykolaiv, supported by continued cruise missile launches into Ukraine by Russian naval forces. • A curfew will be in place in Ukraine’s southern city of Odesa from Saturday evening until Monday evening, in response to the shelling of the train station in Kramatorsk, and the threat of a missile strike. • Two UN agencies have called for urgent action to help an estimated 1,000 seafarers stranded in Ukrainian ports and waters with dwindling supplies. • The US-based Institute for the Study of War says Ukrainian forces retain control of defensive positions in eastern and south-western Mariupol. Russian forces are continuing to attempt to redeploy units in eastern Ukraine. However, such troops are “unlikely to enable a Russian breakthrough and face poor morale”, ISW says. • Some Russian military units have experienced major losses, a senior US defence official said, and the Pentagon estimates Russia’s combat power is between 80% and 85% of pre-invasion levels.
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HEADLINE	04/08 Russians evidence high military casualties
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/08/russians-start-to-see-evidence-of-high-military-casualties-in-ukraine
GIST	A phone camera pans slowly across the portraits of 55 men, each wearing the dress uniform of Russia’s elite airborne units. Small candles have been placed by the photographs of the men, as have sky blue berets and the blue-and-white striped undershirts worn by the paratrooper units who led Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The video of the memorial for the soldiers of the 247th Guards Air Assault Regiment is unverified – it was first published by Russia’s iStories news outlet, which said it was submitted by a reader.

But the footage adds weight to a growing consensus that the numbers of Russian casualties – especially among elite units such as the Russian airborne – are far higher than officials have so far admitted.

Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin spokesperson, said on Thursday that the country had “significant losses of troops and it’s a huge tragedy for us” during an interview on Sky News.

The frank admission of the scale of Russian losses is rare among government officials, who have consistently assured the public and Vladimir Putin that Russia’s “special operation” is going according to plan.

In an attempt at damage control on Friday, Peskov said he was referring to the official defence ministry numbers of 1,351 soldiers killed since Russia launched its invasion on 24 February.

“You and I have the same numbers as those published by the defence ministry,” Peskov said. “This is a substantial number.”

Ukraine has estimated that 18,900 Russian soldiers have died since the beginning of the war, citing its own recovery of bodies and intercepted Russian communications. Russia has called the Ukrainian numbers inflated.

But questions about the Russian military’s accounting practices remain, as official statistics may not count soldiers missing in action, and critics have accused the Kremlin of intentionally covering up the high number of war dead to prevent discontent at home.

And growing evidence suggests high numbers of casualties among the units that led Russia’s invasion in February, including paratrooper units considered to be the “tip of the spear”.

The video of the memorial for the 247th Guards Air Assault Regiment, which is based in Stavropol, Russia, showed a number of men whose deaths have already been confirmed through public accounts.

Another video from a nearby cemetery that is used by the unit, along with others, showed a long row of funeral wreaths.

The unit was reported to have fought in southern Ukraine near the city of Kherson, which has been held by the Russian army since late February. A Ukrainian counter-attack near Kherson has led to heavy losses for Russian troops there.

Last month, Russia reported the death of the commander of the regiment, Col Konstantin Zizevsky, one of at least eight Russian colonels to have been killed during the war in Ukraine.

BBC Russian, which has kept a confirmed count of the number of Russian losses, has said that 217 of its 1,083 confirmed Russian war dead were officers, from junior lieutenants to generals. Senior Russian officers often fight alongside their units because decisions must be confirmed by higher-ranking personnel.

Of the confirmed deaths in the military, more than 15% come from Russia’s elite airborne, or VDV, units. The high number of losses among those units has also been accompanied by reports of desertions.

According to the opposition Pskovskaya Guberniya newspaper, about 60 Russian paratroopers are facing disciplinary action after refusing to travel from Belarus, where many had been dispatched for what they believed were exercises, into Ukraine. Those reports have not been confirmed.

	<p>But Russian media have also reported on members of two national guards units that have refused to fight in Ukraine. And lawyers say that soldiers from more than 17 cities have requested aid to either avoid being sent to Ukraine or ask for help in returning home.</p> <p>“They’re all reporting being pressured, facing the threat of criminal charges, being discharged, or having their documents withheld,” wrote Pavel Chikov, head of the Agora international human rights group. “For protection from a possible criminal investigation, please contact our lawyers.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Russia accused of ‘monstrous’ war crime
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/08/kramatorsk-train-station-ukraine-russia-rockets
GIST	<p>Volodymyr Zelenskiy has referred to the missile strike on a railway station in eastern Ukraine as a Russian war crime and said it must be one of the charges to feature at any future tribunal over the invasion.</p> <p>Five children were among at least 50 people killed when a missile hit Kramatorsk railway station on Friday. The US has also blamed Russia, saying it believes it used a short range ballistic missile. Russia has denied responsibility.</p> <p>Zelenskiy said he expects “a firm, global response ... Like the massacre in Bucha, like many other Russian war crimes, the missile strike on Kramatorsk must be one of the charges at the tribunal, which is bound to happen,” he said.</p> <p>Zelenskiy also repeated his call for more weapons to be provided to Ukraine, and for greater sanctions to be imposed on Russia. “The pressure on Russia must be increased. It is necessary to introduce a full energy embargo – on oil, on gas. It is energy exports that provide the lion’s share of Russia’s profits. Russian banks must also be completely disconnected from the global financial system.”</p> <p>The Kremlin stood accused of carrying out a “monstrous” war crime in Kramatorsk after a Russian ballistic missile hit its crowded train station.</p> <p>The powerful Tochka-U rocket landed outside the main station building where 4,000 people were waiting to be evacuated. The authorities had urged residents to leave the region before a Russian military assault expected from next week.</p> <p>At least 87 people were wounded in the strike, said Pavlo Kyrylenko, the governor of Donetsk Oblast. Many lost limbs. Surgeons at the city’s hospital were struggling to cope, with numerous patients in a critical condition, Kyrylenko said.</p> <p>He said Russia had used cluster munitions, and its goal was to “sow panic and fear” and to kill as many civilians as possible. “The enemy knew that this is a city, that this is a crowd of people, this is a railway station,” he said.</p> <p>Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, angrily accused Moscow of “murderous deliberate slaughter” and vowed: “We will bring each war criminal to justice.”</p> <p>At the scene, one woman, Natalia, said she heard a “double explosion”. She told AFP: “I rushed to the wall for protection. I saw people covered in blood coming into the station and bodies everywhere on the ground. I don’t know if they were injured or dead.”</p> <p>Another woman said she was looking for her husband. “He was here. I can’t reach him,” she said.</p> <p>A video shot in the seconds after the explosion revealed a scene of horror. Bodies lay in the station entrance and between a row of outside seats. There were screams and cries for help. “My lord, so many corpses,” one woman said.</p>

The dead lay next to their luggage, which had been packed for a journey that was meant to take them to the west of the country and to safety. A turquoise pram was abandoned, together with carry-on suitcases and travel pillows. Pools of blood stained the ground.

In a post on his Telegram channel, Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said "Russian monsters" were responsible for the carnage. He suggested it was part of a deliberate Russian strategy to destroy civilian targets, including hospitals and schools.

"[They] have not abandoned their methods. Lacking the strength and courage to fight with us on the battlefield, they are cynically destroying the civilian population," Zelenskiy wrote, posting photos from the scene.

He added: "This is an evil that has no limits. And if it is not punished, it will never stop." He said no Ukrainian troops were at the station when it was hit.

Boris Johnson said Russia's actions were "unconscionable" and a war crime. Speaking at a press conference with the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, he said Moscow should declare a ceasefire and withdraw its troops. "The war has to stop immediately," Johnson said.

The giant missile landed on a patch of grass. Written on the side in large white Cyrillic letters were the words: "For [the] children" – a grimly ironic Russian propaganda slogan given that four children died in the strike, as well as many parents.

Four cars were destroyed. Bodies were loaded into a military truck. Rescue workers extinguished a fire, with a pall of grey smoke enveloping the area. Most of those who gathered at the station were woman, children and elderly people.

Vladimir Putin has justified his invasion of Ukraine by citing the need to protect Russian-speaking civilians in the Donbas region. After failing to capture Kyiv, he has seemingly scrapped plans to topple its pro-western government. Moscow says it now intends to concentrate its offensive military operations in the east.

The apparent goal is to expand the territory administered by pro-Russia separatists from the so-called Luhansk and Donetsk people's republics. Key targets are the adjacent Kyiv-controlled cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, a major hub for Ukraine's defending troops.

If Putin succeeds in occupying the administrative borders of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, he may seek a peace deal, Ukrainian officials believe. They say Russia's president wants to declare victory in Ukraine in time for 9 May, when a Red Square parade celebrates the Soviet army's defeat of Hitler.

Some initial reports on Russia state media said the missile fired at Kramatorsk hit a military transport target. Subsequently Moscow denied responsibility for the strike. It then blamed Ukrainian forces.

Those who perished were waiting to board trains to take them out of the war zone. "This is a deliberate attack on the passenger infrastructure of the railway and the residents of Kramatorsk," the head of Ukraine's railway company, Alexander Kamyshin, wrote on Twitter.

Some queueing outside the station had come from frontline towns that have been repeatedly shelled since 2014, when Moscow instigated an uprising in the industrial Donbas area – towns such as Avdiivka, Maryinka and Vuhledar, all now under intense fire.

Friday's attack was also a deliberate message to European leaders visiting Kyiv, said Ukraine's deputy prime minister, Iryna Vereshchuk. The European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, her deputy, Josep Borrell, and the European Council president, Charles Michel, travelled to the capital by train using the network Russia blew up.

	<p>“You have to take into account that there were evacuations from Kramatorsk every day. Only today, when high-ranking European leaders are in Kyiv, do they decide to kill so many people, exactly knowing that there is an evacuation going on,” Vereshchuk said, calling for further sanctions on Russia.</p> <p>Von der Leyen described the strike as despicable. “I am appalled by the loss of life. My thoughts with the families of the victims,” she said. She and her colleagues met in person with Zelenskiy. It was the highest-ranking European delegation since Russia’s invasion on 24 February.</p> <p>Borrell said he “strongly condemned” Russia’s “indiscriminate” actions. “This is yet another attempt to close escape routes for those fleeing this unjustified war and cause human suffering,” he tweeted.</p> <p>There seems little doubt Russia is determined to disrupt transport links to and from the east before an imminent large-scale military action. Earlier this week it bombed Kramatorsk and severed the rail connection by hitting the line near Sloviansk. Three trains were delayed. The track was later repaired.</p> <p>On Wednesday all three of the region’s governors urged civilians to leave while they still could. Russia is pressing from the north and the city of Izyum and is seeking to advance from the south and the port city of Mariupol, which it has besieged for over a month. The pincer movement, if successful, would trap Ukraine’s army.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Germany to stop Russia gas imports ‘soon’
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/08/germany-russian-gas-imports-olaf-scholz-boris-johnson-ukraine
GIST	<p>The German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, has said his country is doing all it can to wean itself off Russian energy, but declined to endorse a claim by Boris Johnson that it would stop importing Russian gas by the middle of 2024.</p> <p>Scholz said only that the goal would be achieved very soon, and that Germany would stop using Russian coal by the summer and Russian oil by the end of the year.</p> <p>The two leaders were speaking at a Downing Street press conference after the first extensive bilateral talks since Scholz was elected to head a coalition government.</p> <p>Scholz also implied Germany would not supply Ukraine with 100 Marder tanks, saying he would only supply weapons that were practical and useful. A Ukrainian request for the tanks has been held up by the German defence department, leading to tensions between the Ukrainians and Germans.</p> <p>Johnson, one of the closest allies of the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, struck a different tone than Scholz about the value of holding talks with Vladimir Putin, after Polish criticism of the French president, Emmanuel Macron, for persisting with his dialogue with the Russian leader.</p> <p>Johnson said: “I have got to say, negotiating with Putin does not seem to be full of promise or that he can be trusted.” He said he was “deeply, deeply sceptical and cynical about Putin’s assurances” and that “the Europe we knew just six weeks ago no longer exists”.</p> <p>Scholz said the criticism of Macron was unjustified and that it was important Putin heard voices other than from his inner circle.</p> <p>Throughout the press conference, Scholz was challenged to explain why Germany was not willing to go faster to reduce the scale of Russian energy imports, given the €35bn (£29bn) in revenue from the EU it has generated for Russia since the war started.</p>

He insisted it would take time to remove the legal obstacle to build the necessary liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals on Germany's northern coast that would be able to store imported LNG from countries such as Qatar and the US.

He said: "We are actively working to get independent from the import of oil and we think that we will be able to make it during this year. And we are actively working to get independent from the necessity of importing gas from Russia. This is, as you may imagine, not that easy, because it needs infrastructure to be built."

Johnson voiced sympathy over the German predicament. "This is not easy for any of us and I applaud the seismic decisions taken by Olaf's government to move Germany away from Russian hydrocarbons. We cannot transform our respective energy systems overnight, but we also know that Putin's war will not end overnight".

However, he then added: "I think by the middle of 2024, as I recall, Germany's going to stop using Russian gas, which is quite extraordinary."

Asked if he agreed with Johnson's timetable, Scholz simply said: "We are optimistic that we will get rid of the need of importing gas from Russia very soon."

Scholz stressed that the change in Germany's energy supplies would be permanent, something he said would cause long-term damage to the Russian economy. He said Germany would be using renewables for all its electricity within 20 years.

On arming Ukraine, Johnson signalled a change in strategy. "Some of the kit that Nato has simply wouldn't be appropriate. It may be more useful to support them, the Ukrainians, by backfilling and allowing some of the former Warsaw Pact countries to supply some of their own armour," he said.

The Ukrainian armed forces are trained to use the kind of heavy weaponry that the Czechs and Slovaks are supplying. Britain is sending Ukraine more Starstreak anti-aircraft missiles and 800 anti-tank missiles after an "unconscionable" attack on a train station in the eastern Ukraine city of Kramatorsk on Friday, Johnson said.

The "high-grade military equipment" is worth £100m, Johnson said, with the UK anti-tank missiles seen as particularly potent against Russian forces.

Asked if Germany was willing to send Marder tanks, Scholz said: "We are trying to send those weapons that are helpful and can be used. The successes by the Ukrainian military show that we sent effective weapons – anti-tank weapons, a lot of ammunition and everything that goes with it. At the same time ... we have to take a close look at what can be used effectively, and these are very technical questions."

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HEADLINE	04/08 Scooter ridership booms; high gas prices
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/scooter-ridership-booming-amid-high-gas-prices/NVUV6DHX6ZBCJF7TBM5EKUMZXQ/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — More commuters are turning to non-traditional ways of getting around town than ever before.</p> <p>Transportation robotics company Superpedestrian said they have seen a boom in scooter ridership compared to March 2021.</p> <p>A recent survey asked 2,000 people what they believed was responsible for the increase. The majority said the top reason was high gas prices.</p>

	<p>“Looking at March of 2022, we saw a 360% increase in rides from March of 2021. And that, coupled with the rider survey that we did in the last week, that shows 50% of our respondents said they’d hop on a scooter due to high gas prices. You know, we believe our riders,” said Jamie Perkins, director of communications for Superpedestrian.</p> <p>Improving weather and a return to working in person were other factors.</p> <p>“It’s just convenient for me personally. I use them mostly to commute to and from school and just generally when I’m having fun trying to look at the city. It’s a great way to see the city without having to walk up the big hills,” said rider Xavier Tony.</p> <p>“The parking is crazy. Mine (costs) \$350 a month so I love the transits, the light rail, the scooters. I can’t say anything negative about them,” said rider Jimmy Rodgers.</p> <p>Superpedestrian saw a 41% ridership increase in e-scooters. Perkins said the company tracked thousands of new riders using their app.</p> <p>“Each of our scooters, we have the technology to know where they are, what they’re doing at any time and we’re able to see all of those rides, measure them from month-to-month, week-to-week and day-to-day to see what’s going on,” said Perkins.</p> <p>According to Superpedestrian, the increase in scooter ridership represents a welcome change for many while helping users to get outdoors and leave less of a carbon footprint.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Ferry system long waits, problems
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/ferry-riders-face-long-waits-it-could-get-worse-summer-approaches/4SBVSDZ35HT5O5RG3MDMVD3DU/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Even before noon on Friday, ferry passengers in both Edmonds and Kingston faced two-hour waits.</p> <p>Lisa and James Delgadillo arrived nearly an hour early for the 11:55 a.m. ferry, but didn’t get on a boat until 1:30 p.m.</p> <p>“It’s frustrating because you only have so much time to enjoy your weekend,” said James Delgadillo.</p> <p>The Edmonds-Kingston route should have two ferries, but only has one.</p> <p>Last fall, after a wave of sailings were suddenly canceled for lack of crew, Washington State Ferries cut service so the boats still running would be more reliable.</p> <p>The state has a plan for slowly restoring service across the system, but no timeline, and summer is coming.</p> <p>“What keeps people up at the ferry system at night is thinking about summer, when we carry 50% more people than we do in the winter months, it’s not tolerable now on a lot of the routes,” said WSF spokesman Ian Sterling.</p> <p>He said WSF’s top priority is to hire and train new workers.</p> <p>“Having said that, it will likely be months before we are at a pre-pandemic level of service across all routes,” Sterling said.</p> <p>The ferry system has had other recent problems.</p> <p>A hard landing took a slip at Colman Dock out of service for repairs.</p>

	A stuck train crossing gate delayed ferry loading in Edmonds, and sailings were canceled when officials had trouble getting a ferry fueled.
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HEADLINE	04/08 Fed: consumer debt jumps to record high
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/fed-reports-us-consumer-debt-jumped-by-nearly-42b-in-february-federal-reserve-money-inflation-pandemic-covid-coronavirus-interest-rate-hikes
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (TND) — As the Federal Reserve signals a faster pace of rate increases, data shows that Americans are more in debt than ever before.</p> <p>The new numbers come from the Federal Reserve's G.19 consumer credit report. Money borrowed has hit a record high — jumping by nearly \$42 billion in February alone.</p> <p>"I think that these numbers are going to reflect the fact that a lot of people are smart enough to say, now is the time to buy. If I've been sitting on the fence, I'm going to go out and buy before prices go up and before interest rates go up because I don't want my monthly payments to go up that much," Duke University economist Connel Fullenkamp said.</p> <p>Americans paid off billions of dollars of credit card debt during the pandemic, which is why some experts say a record number of people are borrowing now before it gets even more expensive to do so.</p> <p>The Federal Reserve will likely continue raising interest rates. It has already increased by 0.25% and now could raise to 0.5% point next month.</p> <p>That major spike in consumer credit puts it at a record high of \$4.5 trillion, \$1.5 trillion of which is "revolving credit." That category, which includes credit cards, jumped more than 11% during a 12-month period.</p> <p>"Part of the reason why the numbers aren't as concerning right now is because people were in a good position. They had been paying back debts, they had been using that extra money coming from the federal government to pay down those credit cards, to pay off old loans. So, there's room to borrow," Fullenkamp said.</p> <p>Fullenkamp says that this record credit climb is a result of both people actually buying more things and paying more for items getting more expensive.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Conventions return to downtown Seattle
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/conventions-return-to-downtown-seattle-bringing-big-business-to-hotels-restaurants
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle's economy is making a strong recovery this week thanks to the convention season kicking off again for the first time in nearly two years.</p> <p>The American Academy of Neurology convention brought more than 7,000 visitors to downtown Seattle in the past five days.</p> <p>It certainly means big business and definitely big bucks. The neurology convention that just wrapped up generated an economic impact of about \$24.5 million for the Seattle region.</p> <p>For the first time in nearly two years, the Washington State Convention Center is welcoming big crowds again.</p> <p>Thousands of neurologists were in Downtown Seattle staying at 14 different local hotels this week.</p>

According to Visit Seattle that amounted to nearly 29,000 contracted room nights.

"The impact has been phenomenal," said Kelly Saling with Visit Seattle. "In Downtown, just on Saturday night, one the biggest nights for neurology, we were running almost 79 percent occupancy which is numbers we've not seen in 2.5 years."

Of course, all those people were eating out too ---at local restaurants like Capital Grille and Von's 1000 Spirits.

"We were so happy to see so many faces and convention is a huge part of our business," said Kristin Kendall with Von's 1000 Spirits. "To have them back in full swing is really, really great."

"This one was our target audience," said Josh Westcott with Capital Grille. "We saw so much of that which was great- knowing that the convention was in town and they did decide to join us."

Again, all the convention visitors coming to town mean people spending a lot of money and time at Seattle's restaurants and hotels.

Industry experts said Seattle hotels are usually 75 percent full.

During the pandemic many hotels said they lost so many guests because no one was traveling and hotel occupancy dropped down to single digits.

That changed with the neurology convention this year-- one of Seattle's largest events.

Interestingly enough, that national convention was booked 10 years ago.

Bill Weise is General Manager of Silver Cloud Hotel-Seattle Stadium and President of the Seattle Hotel Association.

"The more people come to Seattle, the more we see them in restaurants and shops; they turn their dollars over 8-10-12 times," Weise said.

Visit Seattle said there are more big conventions coming. The Washington State Convention Center will hold 4 more major events this month, including a big educators convention next week.

There are 24 more national conventions in Seattle for the rest of the year.

Meanwhile, on Monday, the Port of Seattle also welcomes its first cruise ship --the Norwegian Bliss. It sets sail to Alaska later this month.

Are businesses ready for the bigger crowds? So many of them faced staffing shortages in the past few months.

Many hotels and restaurants said they need to staff up.

"We're seeing more applicants than we did the previous week and the week before," Weise said. "I got two last month. This week, we've got this week, we've got 12."

"Ramping up is a big concern," said Chris Tudor, General Manager of Travelodge by Wyndham by the Space Needle. "We did not know that the convention business was going to come back so quick. Our desk will need more guest service associates because of the volume of the arrivals and departures. We had some veterans that left us. We'll have to fill those shoes. It just takes time."

HEADLINE	04/08 Funko Pop distribution facility to Arizona
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/funko-pop-moving-main-distribution-facility-from-puyallup-to-arizona
GIST	<p>PUYALLUP, Wash. - The Funko Pop brand, headquartered in Everett, announced that it would be closing its main U.S. distribution facility in Puyallup and relocating it to Buckeye, Arizona.</p> <p>The company is leasing a 958,000-square-foot facility in Arizona, which will create over 300 jobs, the company said.</p> <p>"We're excited to bring Funko to Arizona with the opening this month of our nearly one million square foot facility in Buckeye," said Andrew Perlmutter, Chief Executive Officer at Funko. "The demand for Funko products globally is as high as it's ever been and the company recently surpassed a billion dollars in revenue for 2021. The consolidation of several warehouses to one single facility will better improve our customer experience and maximize growth opportunities as our business scales."</p> <p>However, according to the Employment Security Department (ESD), that means that 258 workers will be laid off here in Washington.</p> <p>ESD said layoffs will start at the Puyallup location on June 9.</p> <p>The headquarters and store in Everett will remain open.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Health officials on spring break, new variant
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/can-families-still-gather-for-spring-break-easter-with-new-covid-variant-wa-health-officials-weigh-in
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Across the country, COVID restrictions are easing, but at the same time, Washington is seeing a new surge in cases.</p> <p>In King County alone, cases have doubled since mid-March.</p> <p>Taking a closer look at the numbers: King County saw a 41% spike in cases over the last seven days, which is, on average, 356 new cases every day.</p> <p>But, there's a silver lining-- nearly 72% of eligible Washingtonians are fully vaccinated and close to 60% have had their booster shot.</p> <p>As the numbers rise, health experts are keeping their eyes on a new variant, BA.2.</p> <p>Professor of Global Health at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, Dr. Ali Mokdad, says with each new variant, they look at vaccine escape, where your COVID shot is less effective.</p> <p>He says the BA.2 variant is proving to be more infectious compared to Omicron.</p> <p>"Everything is possible. Viruses keep mutating all the time and you are always at the risk of producing a new mutation," Mokdad said. "All the information we know about BA.2 is it's similar exactly to BA.1 and Omicron in terms of the response of the vaccine, and in terms of immunity from previous infections."</p> <p>While some were surprised by how quickly cases are rising, others anticipated the spike.</p> <p>"I feel like we've been through that cycle a few times over of preemptively removing restrictions and seeing numbers rise, so I think I'm going to maintain the same level of discretion, small groups, small hangouts and testing when I can," said Shaquile Sinclair.</p>

"It just puts a lot of strain when there's an illusion of freedom, it makes it harder for people to get support when things go poorly," Ann Thompson said.

Many wonder why cases are rising if such a large percentage of the population is vaccinated.

The recurring question many of you have, why cases are rising if and when many are vaccinated.

Mokdad said it can be [attributed mainly to two factors](#): waning immunity as many of us received our vaccine more than five months ago, and changes in behavior (most no longer wearing masks).

Still, Mokdad says the case outlook looks good.

"They go a little bit up, but they've come down and they will come down all the way to the next winter," Mokdad said.

FOX 13 asked Mokdad if these new numbers will interfere with spring break or Easter plans. Can people gather with friends, family, neighbors and anyone else who was outside their immediate household?

"We can because we have a variant right now that's less severe compared to the previous one. [It] still poses a threat for people who are immunocompromised, but it's less severe," Dr. Mokdad said. "We can enjoy our lives. We deserve it."

It's important to note the number of deaths has decreased by 60%, with an average of one person dying each day according to the King County and Washington State Departments health report.

Health experts say we're in the endemic stage of this virus.

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HEADLINE	04/09 'Get used to it': outbreaks, living with Covid
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/get-used-to-it-outbreaks-give-taste-of-living-with-virus/
GIST	<p>The U.S. is getting a first glimpse of what it's like to experience COVID-19 outbreaks during this new phase of living with the virus, and the roster of the newly infected is studded with stars.</p> <p>Cabinet members, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Broadway actors and the governors of New Jersey and Connecticut have all tested positive. Outbreaks at Georgetown University and Johns Hopkins University are bringing back mask requirements to those campuses as officials seek out quarantine space.</p> <p>The known infections likely reveal only the tip of the iceberg — with actors and politicians regularly tested at work. Official case figures are certain to be vast undercounts of how widely the virus is circulating because of home testing and mildly sick not bothering to test at all.</p> <p>Across the nation, mask-wearing is at its lowest level since April 2020, said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle. For every 100 infections, only seven are recorded in official tallies, according to his modeling group's latest estimate. That means a place like New York City that's averaging 1,600 cases a day has a dramatically higher true number of infections.</p> <p>Mokdad expects the high level of U.S. immunity built up from previous infections and vaccinations will protect the nation from a large surge.</p> <p>"We're going to have some infections here and there, but it's not going to shut down the country," Mokdad said. "Life has to go on. We have to be vaccinated and boosted. We need to protect the vulnerable, but we have to get used to it."</p>

On Broadway, several performances of the comedy “Plaza Suite” were canceled after Matthew Broderick tested positive, followed by his wife and co-star, Sarah Jessica Parker. Daniel Craig, too, has been sidelined from his revival of “Macbeth.”

Large indoor gatherings with masks optional have led to infections, with a high-profile party in Washington, D.C., now seen as a possible super-spreader event. Other infection clusters outside of groups that are regularly tested might go undetected, said Josh Michaud, associate director of global health policy with the Kaiser Family Foundation in Washington.

“It’s harder now than it was before to know what’s happening. The future is a little fuzzier because we don’t have as much information at our fingertips,” Michaud said. “If you’re not an actor in a Broadway play or a politician you might fall through the testing cracks.”

The public health response will vary from community to community based on what’s happening locally, Michaud said.

“We’re fighting smaller fires instead of a raging blaze across the country and those smaller fires can be disruptive,” Michaud said. “It leaves everyone to choose their own adventure when it comes to pandemic response and individual behaviors.”

In Washington D.C., the outbreak has been particularly high profile — striking multiple Cabinet secretaries and Congress members along with Mayor Muriel Bowser and the president of Georgetown University.

At least a dozen of those infections can be traced to the Gridiron Club dinner, an annual fixture of the D.C. social calendar that took place Saturday for the first time in three years. The dinner is an example of a return to near-total normality that’s taking place around the country, leading to a spike in positive tests, but not necessarily a corresponding spike in serious illnesses or hospitalizations.

Washington, D.C., like much of the rest of the country, has greatly relaxed its COVID-19 stance in recent weeks. Bowser has allowed vaccination and indoor masking mandates to expire, and the city health department stopped reporting daily virus numbers in early March. Attendees at the Gridiron Club dinner, which Bowser did not attend, had to provide proof of vaccination, but otherwise no masking or social distancing protocols were observed.

And other staples of the D.C. social calendar are also back to normal. The city’s annual Cherry Blossom Festival has been going for weeks — with dozens of associated events, including a parade scheduled for Saturday.

Amid that general return to pre-pandemic behavior, there are a few cautionary steps backward. Georgetown University announced it would reintroduce its indoor mask mandate amid rising infection numbers that include university President John DeGioia

Georgetown’s Chief Public Health Officer Ranit Mishori, in announcing the new restrictions, described the infection spike as “significant” — particularly among undergraduates. “Thankfully, with the vast majority of our community up to date on vaccination, we are not seeing cases involving severe illness,” Mishori wrote.

D.C. health chief Dr. LaQuandra Nesbitt, in comments to reporters this week, has pointed to the ongoing low level of hospitalizations as proof that the vaccinations have successfully limited the severity of the illness.

Virus metrics in Washington have crept up in the past month according to the city health department. The weekly case rate per 100,000 residents climbed from 51 at the beginning of March to 110 at the end of March. But that’s still far below the weekly case rate of 865 per 100,000 residents reported in the second week of January during the omicron variant surge.

	<p>Nesbitt said there were no immediate plans to reinstitute any of the lapsed virus protocols, but that always remained an option in the future.</p> <p>“We need to remember that living with the virus does not mean forgetting about the virus. It’s still out there, it’s still causing people to get sick and some people to die,” Michaud said. “If we’re not prepared, we could be in a bad situation quickly again.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Teamsters end concrete strike without deal
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/real-estate/teamsters-say-they-will-end-seattle-area-concrete-strike-but-still-no-deal-with-employers/
GIST	<p>Hundreds of striking Seattle-area concrete mixer drivers will return to work without a deal, ending a work stoppage that has upended construction projects across the region.</p> <p>Teamsters Local 174 said Friday afternoon that all of the more than 300 striking drivers, who work for six local companies, have “offered an unconditional return to work starting on Monday.” The union had previously sent a portion of its drivers back to work.</p> <p>“This won’t stop the negotiations. It will just stop people thinking we’re to blame and we’re the bad guys,” said Brett Gallagher, a mixer driver and member of the union bargaining committee. “We have a lot of mud to get done and a lot of people to get back to work.”</p> <p>The end of the strike will be a significant turnaround for the local construction industry, where both public and private jobs slowed and scores of workers were laid off because of the lack of concrete. Contractors and politicians have urged the two sides to reach a deal.</p> <p>In a joint statement, the companies whose drivers have been on strike said they “applauded” the decision.</p> <p>“We look forward to welcoming the drivers back so that we can begin filling the backlog created by the strike,” the statement said. “Each of the companies will now focus on rapidly ramping up operations to facilitate the workers’ return; it will take us time to get back to pre-strike levels.”</p> <p>For unionized workers, the end of the strike is likely to bring mixed emotions.</p> <p>Returning to work without a deal is a blow to striking drivers, who appear to have forced little movement from their employers during negotiations on a key issue of health care benefits for retirees. But it will mean a return of steady paychecks for affected workers in other trades.</p> <p>“The majority of us are ready to stay out for another year, but what would that do to the region?” Gallagher said. “We can’t keep asking our brothers and sisters who honor us in every other trade to keep suffering along with us. ... I think we’ve asked that long enough. We’ve got to try something else.”</p> <p>As the strike dragged on, some local concrete suppliers turned to replacement workers and so-called “ghost trucks” to keep concrete moving across the Teamsters picket lines. A handful of union members have also crossed the line. And pressure has mounted as employees in other trades lost work.</p> <p>Job losses hit various building trades, but especially laborers, cement masons and ironworkers, said Monty Anderson, executive secretary of the Seattle Building & Construction Trades Council, which represents local construction unions.</p> <p>“People are going to be happy to go back to work. That’s a fact,” Anderson said. “But we can’t sugarcoat it. These Teamsters stood the line for something that’s bigger than money. It’s tough on retirees.”</p>

The drivers' union has sought improvements to a current retiree healthcare plan and accused the companies of refusing to bargain in good faith.

A current retiree health care plan covers drivers who retire before age 65 until they become eligible for Medicare at 65, but that coverage costs retirees about \$350 a month, Gallagher said. Drivers are seeking an improved plan that would cost current drivers more each month but lower the monthly price for retirees to about \$150, he said.

The Teamsters say they offered to "assume the risk on the retiree health care and pay for it in whole for 10 years — the companies still rejected it."

Throughout the strike, the companies have not commented on the health care issue other than to describe the existing retiree medical plan as "generous."

"We've negotiated in good faith, working hard to find an agreement that meets the economic needs of the drivers," the companies said Friday.

Developers and public agencies whose projects have been slowed by the strike welcomed the announcement.

"With months of backlogged concrete deliveries across the region, we all must now work together to dig ourselves out of a deep hole," Sound Transit CEO Peter Rogoff said in a statement. Contractors working on Sound Transit projects laid off about 200 workers between early December and late March, according to the agency.

Concrete flowing "means construction sites and critical infrastructure like housing, transit, bridges and stormwater projects will be back on track soon," said King County Executive Dow Constantine.

At the high-profile convention center expansion downtown, the strike has pushed back the expected completion date this summer by 2 1/2 or three months, said Matt Griffin, principal at Pine Street Group.

The project still needs concrete for its loading dock area, sidewalks, and for work on nearby residential and office buildings.

An end to the strike is "very good for the community," Griffin said, citing housing and public projects.

Negotiations between the two sides will continue.

Despite help from mediators, those talks have shown little apparent progress.

"The mediators are throwing their hands up. We're throwing our hands up. The companies are throwing their hands up," Gallagher said.

The concrete companies have defended their negotiations. "We remain [committed] to bargaining in good faith and we look forward to continuing to negotiate with Teamsters on a new contract," the companies said.

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	04/08 DOJ Sandworm operation raises questions
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/dojs-sandworm-operation-raises-questions-about-how-far-the-feds-can-go-to-disarm-botnets/

The notion that citizens are protected from unreasonable search and seizure is a bedrock legal principle: A court must issue a search warrant before police can enter a private home and ransack it looking for evidence.

In what former prosecutors and legal experts call a landmark operation, the Department of Justice has now tested that principle to disrupt a Russian botnet that was spreading malware on a far-flung network of computers. Using so-called remote access techniques, law enforcement effectively broke into infected devices from afar to destroy what the U.S. government calls the “Cyclops Blink” botnet — and did so without the owners’ permission.

While the search warrant publicized by DOJ makes clear that this access did not allow the FBI to “search, view, or retrieve a victim device owner’s content or data,” legal experts say the case does raise questions about how far the government’s power should extend under a federal criminal procedure provision known as Rule 41.

The Kremlin-backed hackers responsible for the botnet — a group known to cybersecurity researchers as Sandworm — exploited a vulnerability in WatchGuard Technologies firewall devices to install malware on a network of compromised devices. By leveraging physical access to a subset of infected devices, the FBI said it was able to reverse engineer its way into accessing all of the botnet’s command and control devices.

The government’s use of a search warrant to gain such remote access to individual computers without notice to the owners relied on a 2016 amendment to Rule 41, a federal rule of criminal procedure. The culmination of a three-year deliberation process which included written comments and public testimony before the federal judiciary’s Advisory Committee on the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure — a committee which includes judges, law professors, and attorneys in private practice — the 2016 amendment was ultimately adopted by the Supreme Court and approved by Congress.

While the amended rule has been used previously, legal experts say this case appears to be the most sweeping and high-profile application of the rule to date and is a notable example of federal prosecutors using it not just to investigate criminal activity but to disrupt it.

‘De facto cybersecurity regulators’

The 2016 change was designed to help the government more easily battle botnets and to support cybercrime investigations in situations like this one where the criminals’ locations are unknown, according to Scott Shackleford, a law professor and the director of the Ostrom Workshop Program on Cybersecurity and Internet Governance at Indiana University.

Shackleford said the revision to Rule 41 allows the FBI to access computers outside the jurisdiction of the court which issued the search warrant.

“This action highlights the precedent, and power, of courts becoming de facto cybersecurity regulators that can empower the Department of Justice to clean up large-scale deployments of malicious code,” Shackleford said via email.

Important and unresolved legal issues are embedded in this case, he said. For instance, he said, society will need to determine how to “balance private property rights against national security needs in cases like this.”

“Under this authority the FBI could hack into computers at will, and without the need for a specific search warrant,” Shackleford said. To date, there are no known examples of the the government using the amended Rule 41 to break into remote computers without a search warrant, but in this case the search warrant the government obtained was used in multiple jurisdictions outside of the one which issued the warrant.

Shackelford added that he is “concerned about the precedent that this sets, both in the U.S., but also globally as other law enforcement agencies around the world might well mirror — and even go further — than what the FBI has done to date.”

The Department of Justice and FBI did answer emails seeking comment by press time.

In a press release announcing the operation, Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen of the Justice Department’s National Security Division said the “court-authorized removal of malware deployed by the Russian GRU demonstrates the department’s commitment to disrupt nation-state hacking using all of the legal tools at our disposal.”

The Department of Justice’s actions to disrupt Cyclops Blink are also emblematic of the federal government’s increasing collaboration with the private sector to achieve dramatic results in a short period of time, according to Mark Bini, a lawyer at the firm Reed Smith who previously worked on cybercrime as a federal prosecutor.

“It is particularly interesting that this news comes out at the same time as Microsoft announcing, related to a separate incident, that it had taken control of and taken down seven internet domains linked to a Russian state sponsored hacking group,” Bini said via email. “All of this underscores how important the private sector will be with respect to the United States’ cyber defense, and suggests that we will see the Department of Justice working collaboratively with the private sector to turbo-charge its efforts to combat state-sponsored cyber-attacks.”

How much is too much?

There is some debate in legal circles around how far law enforcement can go when using remote access technology and how appropriate it is to leverage the tool to disrupt cybercrimes as opposed to investigate them, according to Christopher Painter, a former federal prosecutor who prosecuted several high-profile cybercrimes before becoming the top cyber diplomat at the State Department.

The case “reflects an overall change over the last 10 years at the Justice Department to not just focus on putting handcuffs on people, which is an important part of their job, but also to disrupt criminal activity,” Painter said.

The Justice Department announced a similar case last April, when the agency publicized what it said in a press release was a “court-authorized operation to copy and remove malicious web shells from hundreds of vulnerable computers in the United States.” Hackers in that case exploited zero-day vulnerabilities in Microsoft Exchange Server software to implant code that could enable remote administration and allow continued access. Microsoft alleged that a state-sponsored cyber-espionage group based in China — which it called Hafnium — was responsible.

In that operation, the Department of Justice said the FBI disrupted the attack “by issuing a command through the web shell to the server, which was designed to cause the server to delete only the web shell (identified by its unique file path).”

Shoba Pillay, a former federal cybercrimes prosecutor who is co-chair of the data privacy and cybersecurity practice at the law firm Jenner & Block, said the latest DOJ action is “unique because of the breadth and scope” of the operation. Other botnet takedowns were not as sweeping as this one, but Pillay said the Department of Justice has used them to disrupt Sandworm attacks in the recent past.

While some have raised privacy concerns about federal operations like this one, Pillay said that because the government obtained a court-authorized search warrant she sees that as a non-issue. The bigger question is whether the government should be permitted to trespass into private computers and delete things without notice to the owner. Pillay said that while she has heard of no “pushback or risks” from prior botnet takedowns, there are outstanding questions about how targeted such operations should be.

“Is it a bridge too far for the government to be going into private computers and deleting things?” Pillay asked. “Does the government feel comfortable that what they’re doing is controlled, and not otherwise impacting each individual system?”

Ultimately, Pillay said, she finds it helpful to use a framework she read in the New York University School of Law publication Just Security to think about the legal case for operations like this one, particularly in light of the Department of Justice’s charge to protect public safety.

The author of that article, April Falcon Doss, used an analogy to how the FBI would react if bombs were planted on private property across multiple states.

“[If] those bombs are armed and could go off at any time, the FBI is going to take swift action to find and neutralize those devices — especially if it’s difficult for property owners to detect them,” Doss wrote. “In exigent circumstances like these, law enforcement would be justified in entering directly onto the private property in order to neutralize the bombs and seize the evidence. The nature of this remote access malware is, from a cyber threat perspective, like an armed bomb.”

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HEADLINE	04/10 Email scam costliest type of cybercrime
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/accounts-deceivable-email-scam-costliest-type-cybercrime
GIST	<p>A shopping spree in Beverly Hills, a luxury vacation in Mexico, a bank account that jumped from \$299.77 to \$1.4 million overnight.</p> <p>From the outside, it looked like Moe and Kateryna Abourched had won the lottery.</p> <p>But this big payday didn’t come from lucky numbers. Rather, a public school district in Michigan was tricked into wiring its monthly health insurance payment to the bank account of a California nail salon the Abourcheds owned, according to a search warrant application filed by a Secret Service agent in federal court.</p> <p>The district — and taxpayers — fell victim to an online scam called Business Email Compromise, or BEC for short, police say. The couple deny any wrongdoing and have not been charged with any crimes.</p> <p>BEC scams are a type of crime where criminals hack into email accounts, pretend to be someone they’re not and fool victims into sending money where it doesn’t belong. These crimes get far less attention than the massive ransomware attacks that have triggered a powerful government response, but BEC scams have been by far the costliest type of cybercrime in the U.S. for years, according to the FBI — siphoning untold billions from the economy as authorities struggle to keep up.</p> <p>The huge payoffs and low risks associated with BEC scams have attracted criminals worldwide. Some flaunt their ill-gotten riches on social media, posing in pictures next to Ferraris, Bentleys and stacks of cash.</p> <p>“The scammers are extremely well organized and law enforcement is not,” said Sherry Williams, a director of a San Francisco nonprofit recently hit by a BEC scam.</p> <p>Losses in the U.S. to BEC scams in 2021 were nearly \$2.4 billion, according to a new report by the FBI. That’s a 33% increase from 2020 and more than a tenfold increase from just seven years ago.</p> <p>And experts say many victims never come forward and the FBI’s numbers only show a small fraction of how much money is stolen..</p> <p>“It’s one of the most lucrative things out there,” said Shalabh Mohan, chief product officer at Area 1 Security.</p>

In the nail salon case involving Grand Rapids, police say \$2.8 million was stolen. Banks were able to recall about half that amount once the scam was discovered, court records show.

A Secret Service agent said in an affidavit as part of a search warrant application that someone hacked into the email account of one of the school district's human resource employees and sent emails that persuaded a colleague in the finance department to change the bank account where the health insurance payments were sent.

The emails were brief and unfailingly polite. "Please kindly update" the records, one of them said — words the real HR employee would later tell police she never uses, according to the affidavit.

Police tracked the money to the salon's bank account owned by the Abourcheds, the affidavit says. After the theft was detected, Moe Abourched contacted a Grand Rapids police detective and said he'd been fooled by a European woman named "Dora" into accepting the funds and forwarding them to other accounts, according to the affidavit.

The Secret Service agent said Abourched's claims were false and he'd used a similar ruse with police after he received money from a BEC scam targeting a Florida storage company.

Police put the couple under surveillance and in October searched their apartment, offices and BMW, court records show. Police said earlier this year they needed more time to examine the data in the couple's phones and computers.

The Abourcheds' lawyer, Kevin Gres, said his clients have done nothing wrong and no charges should be filed.

"My clients were unwitting victims in this scheme," he said.

BEC scammers use a variety of techniques to hack into legitimate business email accounts and trick employees to send wire payments or make purchases they shouldn't. Targeted phishing emails are a common type of attack, but experts say the scammers have been quick to adopt new technologies, like "deep fake" audio generated by artificial intelligence to pretend to be executives at a company and fool subordinates into sending money.

In the case of Williams, the San Francisco nonprofit director, thieves hacked the email account of the organization's bookkeeper, then inserted themselves into a long email thread, sent messages asking to change the wire payment instructions for a grant recipient, and made off with \$650,000.

After she discovered what happened, Williams said, her calls to law enforcement went nowhere.

The FBI told her the local U.S. attorney's office won't take her case. She flew to Odessa, Texas, where the bank that initially received the stolen money was located. The money by then was long gone and the local detective was powerless to help. Williams asked her U.S. senators for help and later learned the Secret Service was investigating, but said it hasn't given her any updates.

Crane Hassold, an expert on BEC scams and former cyber analyst with the FBI, has heard of federal prosecutors declining to take BEC cases unless several million dollars were stolen, a minimum threshold that speaks to how out of control the problem is.

"There's so many of them they can't possibly work them all," said Hassold, now director of threat intelligence at Abnormal Security.

Almost every enterprise is vulnerable to BEC scams, from Fortune 500 companies to small towns. Even the State Department got duped into sending BEC scammers more than \$200,000 in grant money meant to help Tunisian farmers, court records show.

The Justice Department has launched months-long operations in recent years that have netted hundreds of arrests worldwide.

“Our message to criminals involved in these types of BEC schemes will remain clear: The FBI’s memory and reach is long and wide-ranging, we will relentlessly pursue you no matter where you may be located,” said Brian Turner, executive assistant director of the FBI’s Criminal, Cyber, Response, and Services Branch.

But security experts say the wave of arrests has had little impact, and the FBI’s own numbers show that BEC scams continue to grow at a rapid clip.

“You can arrest 100 of the guys and there’s no ripple effect,” said Hassold.

Many of those arrested by U.S. authorities are lower-level “money mules,” who move stolen money around the banking system until it’s out of reach to authorities.

“Mules” don’t need hacking skills and come from a variety of backgrounds. A South Florida man, Alfredo Veloso, pleaded guilty in 2019 after prosecutors say he recruited women he met through his business making “kink pornography” videos to be money mules for BEC and other cyber scams.

Sophisticated BEC scams targeting businesses and other organizations started taking off in the mid-2010s. It was also around that time when ransomware attacks — in which hackers break into networks and encrypt data — started to grow in frequency and severity.

For years both BEC scams and ransomware attacks were treated largely as a law enforcement problem. That’s still true for BEC attacks, but ransomware is now a key national security concern after a series of disruptive attacks on critical infrastructure like the one last year against the biggest fuels pipeline in the U.S. that led to gas shortages along the East Coast.

The National Security Agency’s hackers have taken action to disrupt ransomware operators’ networks. The Justice Department set up a ransomware task force to better organize the law enforcement response. And U.S. President Joe Biden has pressed the issue directly with President Vladimir Putin of Russia, where many ransomware operators are located.

Nothing close to those efforts has been deployed against BEC fraud despite the huge financial losses.

“It’s a bunch of tiny little silos, and they still haven’t figured out a way to have just a single source that goes after these things,” said John Wilson, a threat researcher at the cybersecurity firm Agari.

If the U.S. were to launch a whole-of-government response to BEC fraud, it almost certainly would focus heavily on Nigeria.

Nowhere are BEC fraudsters more active than in Africa’s most populous nation, where scammers have been able to operate almost unchecked for decades. The well-worn Nigerian Prince scam may now be a global punchline, but a new generation is making fortunes through sophisticated BEC fraud.

BEC scammers from Nigeria are glorified in pop songs and show off their wealth on Instagram and Facebook, posing with expensive cars or piles of money.

Ramon Abbas, a well-known social Nigerian media influencer who went by Ray Hushpuppi, had more than 2 million followers on Instagram before he was arrested in Dubai. Abbas’ social media posts showed him living a life of total luxury, complete with private jets, ultra-expensive cars and high-end clothes and watches.

“I hope someday I will be inspiring more young people to join me on this path,” read one Instagram post by Abbas, who pleaded guilty in the U.S. to international money laundering related to BEC and other cybercrimes last year. His sentencing is currently set for July.

Pete Renals, a threat researcher at Palo Alto’s Unit 42, said tech-savvy Nigerian criminals started learning how to use available malware to steal victims’ credentials around 2014. As the software changed, the scammers changed too. In 2018, he said, researchers started seeing Nigerian malware being developed in-country by the BEC scammers themselves.

“It does not seem like there’s a whole lot slowing them down,” he said. They see “no reason to stop.”

Obinwanne Okeke was one of Nigeria’s best known young entrepreneurs when he was a featured panelist at an event hosted by the prestigious London School of Economics.

“If it’s not born in you to take up challenges, you cannot do it,” Okeke said at the 2018 event when discussing his entrepreneurial drive.

But just days before he made those comments, Okeke had been busy sending fake invoices and defrauding the British sales office of the heavy equipment manufacturer Caterpillar out of \$11 million through a BEC scam, according to the FBI. He was arrested at Dulles Airport outside Washington in 2019, pleaded guilty to wire fraud a year later and is now serving a 10-year prison sentence.

BEC scammers arrested by police in Nigeria often have better luck and win back their freedom by paying fines or bribes, experts say. Adedeji Oyenuga, a sociology professor at Lagos State University who has studied cybercrime culture, said there’s little fear by BEC scammers of being punished if caught.

“The person will walk around the streets freely knowing nobody is going to say anything about what he or she is doing,” Oyenuga said.

In the Hushpuppi case, U.S. prosecutors have also charged Abba Kyari, a top Nigerian law enforcement official who prosecutors say falsely imprisoned one of Abbas’ criminal rivals. Kyari remains in Nigeria, where media reports say he’s been arrested on a separate charges related to alleged drug smuggling.

Doug Witschi, an assistant director at the global police organization Interpol, said tech companies that help facilitate BEC crimes need to be more active in stopping such behavior.

“We can’t arrest our way out of this challenge,” he said.

Unlike ransomware operators who try to keep their communications private, BEC scammers often openly exchange services, share tips or show off their wealth on social media platforms like Facebook and Telegram.

A Facebook group called Wire Wire(.)com, which was until recently available to anyone with a Facebook account, acted as a message board for people to offer BEC-related services and other cybercrimes.

The page, which had a profile picture of a duffle bag filled with cash, was created in 2015 and had more than 1,400 members. It was taken down shortly after The Associated Press asked Facebook about it last month. The company declined comment.

In the case of the stolen Grand Rapids money, it was social media that helped law enforcement when seeking a federal judge’s approval for a search warrant.

Included in the application was a vacation Instagram post by Kateryna Abourched, which linked the timing of her trip with a \$3,503 payment to a luxury resort in Mexico made from the bank account that had received the stolen Grand Rapids money.

	"Vacation is always inspiring," she wrote in her Instagram post.
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HEADLINE	04/08 Finland govt. sites offline; DDoS attacks
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/finland-government-sites-offline/
GIST	<p>The websites of Finland's defense and foreign affairs were taken offline today following DDoS attacks. The ministries each confirmed the attacks on Twitter earlier today, although the websites now appear to be back up and running. The nation's Ministry of Defense wrote at 10.45 am GMT: "The Department of Defense website http://defmin.fi is currently under attack. We are currently investigating. We will post any additional information below." It followed up with: "For the time being, we will keep the Department of Defense website closed until the harmful traffic on the website is gone. All our bulletins are readable http://valtioneuvosto.fi."</p> <p>Shortly after, at 10.54 am, Finland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs tweeted: "There are currently disruptions in the Foreign Ministry's online services. http://Um.fi and Finlanabroad.fi sites have been denied a denial of service attack. We'll investigate and try to get the services up and running as soon as possible. We apologize for the inconvenience."</p> <p>However, at 2.06 pm, the official Finnish government Twitter account confirmed the issues had been resolved, and both ministries' websites had resumed operations. It stated: "Denial-of-service attack is now over. Due to website protection, main part of the sites continued to work normally during the attack."</p> <p>There is currently no information regarding the attackers' identity, although suspicion is likely to fall on Russian threat actors given the timing of the incidents. Earlier today, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed the Finnish parliament via video link about the conflict. Additionally, reports in the past few days suggest Finland is considering seeking NATO membership, a move strongly opposed by the Kremlin.</p> <p>Finland's Ministry of Defense also claimed that a Russian state aircraft violated Finnish airspace this morning.</p> <p>DDoS attacks and website defacements of government websites have taken place regularly in the build-up to and since the Russia-Ukraine conflict began, with both sides impacted.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Snap-on discloses data breach
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/snap-on-discloses-data-breach-claimed-by-conti-ransomware-gang/
GIST	<p>American automotive tools manufacturer Snap-on announced a data breach exposing associate and franchisee data after the Conti ransomware gang began leaking the company's data in March.</p> <p>Snap-on is a leading manufacturer and designer of tools, software, and diagnostic services used by the transportation industry through various brands, including Mitchell1, Norbar, Blue-Point, Blackhawk, and Williams.</p> <p>Yesterday, Snap-on disclosed a data breach after they detected suspicious activity in their network, which led to them shutting down all of their systems.</p> <p>"In early March, Snap-on detected unusual activity in some areas of its information technology environment. We quickly took down our network connections as part of our defense protocols, particularly appropriate given heightened warnings from various agencies," reads a notice on the Snap-on website.</p> <p>"We launched a comprehensive analysis assisted by a leading external forensics firm, identified the event as a security incident, and notified law enforcement of the incursion."</p>

After conducting an investigation, Snap-on discovered that threat actors stole personal data belonging to employees between March 1st and March 3rd, 2022.

"We believe the incident involved associate and franchisee data including information such as: names, Social Security Numbers, dates of birth, and employee identification numbers," discloses a Snap-on [data breach notification](#) submitted to the California Attorney General's office.

Snap-on is offering a free one-year subscription to the IDX identity theft protection service for those affected.

Conti claimed an attack on Snap-on

While Snap-on's data breach notification did not shed much light on its attack, BleepingComputer received an anonymous tip in early March stating that one of Snap-on's subsidiaries, Mitchell1, was suffering an outage caused by a ransomware attack.

Mitchell1 had initially tweeted about the outage but soon deleted the notices from Twitter and Facebook.

However, another source told BleepingComputer that it was not Mitchell1 who had suffered an attack but their parent company Snap-on.

Soon after, threat intelligence researcher [Ido Cohen spotted](#) that the Conti ransomware gang claimed to have attacked Snap-on and had begun to leak almost 1 GB of documents that were allegedly stolen during the attack.

The Conti gang quickly removed the data leak, and Snap-on has not reappeared on their data leak site, leading security researchers to tell BleepingComputer that they believe Snap-on paid a ransom for the data not to be leaked.

BleepingComputer has contacted Snap-on to confirm if the disclosed data breach is linked to the alleged Conti ransomware attack, and we will update this story if we hear back.

Who is Conti Ransomware?

[Conti](#) is a ransomware operation operated by a Russian hacking group known for other malware infections, such as Ryuk, TrickBot, and BazarLoader.

Conti commonly breaches a network after corporate devices become infected with the [BazarLoader or TrickBot malware infections](#), which provide remote access to the hacking group.

Once they gain access to an internal system, they spread through the network, steal data, and deploy the ransomware.

The Conti gang recently suffered their own data breach after siding with Russia over the invasion of Ukraine, leading to a Ukrainian researcher publishing almost [170,000 internal chat conversations](#) between the Conti ransomware gang members and the [Conti ransomware source code](#).

Conti is known for past attacks on high-profile organizations, including Ireland's [Health Service Executive \(HSE\)](#) and [Department of Health \(DoH\)](#), the [City of Tulsa](#), [Broward County Public Schools](#), and [Advantech](#).

Due to the cybercrime gang's ongoing activity, the US government issued an [advisory on Conti ransomware attacks](#).

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SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hackers-use-contis-leaked-ransomware-to-attack-russian-companies/
GIST	<p>A hacking group used the Conti's leaked ransomware source code to create their own ransomware to use in cyberattacks against Russian organizations.</p> <p>While it is common to hear of ransomware attacks targeting companies and encrypting data, we rarely hear about Russian organizations getting attacked similarly.</p> <p>This lack of attacks is due to the general belief by Russian hackers that if they do not attack Russian interests, then the country's law enforcement would turn a blind eye toward attacks on other countries.</p> <p>However, the tables have now turned, with a hacking group known as NB65 now targeting Russian organizations with ransomware attacks.</p> <p>Ransomware targets Russia</p> <p>For the past month, a hacking group known as NB65 has been breaching Russian entities, stealing their data, and leaking it online, warning that the attacks are due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The Russian entities claimed to have been attacked by the hacking group include document management operator Tensor, Russian space agency Roscosmos, and VGTRK, the state-owned Russian Television and Radio broadcaster.</p> <p>The attack on VGTRK was particularly significant as it led to the alleged theft of 786.2 GB of data, including 900,000 emails and 4,000 files, which were published on the DDoS Secrets website.</p> <p>More recently, the NB65 hackers have turned to a new tactic — targeting Russian organizations with ransomware attacks since the end of March.</p> <p>What makes this more interesting, is that the hacking group created their ransomware using the leaked source code for the Conti Ransomware operation, which are Russian threat actors who prohibit their members from attacking entities in Russia.</p> <p>Conti's source code was leaked after they sided with Russia over the attack on Ukraine, and a security researcher leaked 170,000 internal chat messages and source code for their operation.</p> <p>BleepingComputer first learned of NB65's attacks by threat analyst Tom Malka, but we could not find a ransomware sample, and the hacking group was not willing to share it.</p> <p>However, this changed yesterday when a sample of the NB65's modified Conti ransomware executable was uploaded to VirusTotal, allowing us to get a glimpse of how it works.</p> <p>Almost all antivirus vendors detect this sample on VirusTotal as Conti, and Intezer Analyze also determined it uses 66% of the same code as the usual Conti ransomware samples.</p> <p>BleepingComputer gave NB65's ransomware a run, and when encrypting files, it will append the .NB65 extension to the encrypted file's names.</p> <p>The ransomware will also create ransom notes named R3ADM3.txt throughout the encrypted device, with the threat actors blaming the cyberattack on President Vladimir Putin for invading Ukraine.</p> <p>"We're watching very closely. Your President should not have committed war crimes. If you're searching for someone to blame for your current situation look no further than Vladimir Putin," reads the NB65 ransomware note....</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 War triggers crackdown on Russia hackers
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/russia-ukraine-us-hacker-counterattack/
GIST	<p>SINCE RUSSIA LAUNCHED its full-blown invasion of Ukraine in late February, a wave of predictable cyberattacks has accompanied that offensive, striking everything from Ukrainian government agencies to satellite networks, with mixed results. Less expected, however, was the cyber counteroffensive from the US government—not in the form of retaliatory hacking, but in a broad collection of aggressive legal and policy moves designed to call out the Kremlin's most brazen cyberattack groups, box them in, and even directly disrupt their hacking capabilities.</p> <p>Over the past two months, President Joe Biden's executive branch has taken more actions to deter and even temporarily disarm Russia's most dangerous hackers than perhaps any previous administration in such a short space of time. US countermeasures have ranged from publicly pinning the blame for distributed denial of service attacks targeting Ukrainian banks on Russia's GRU military intelligence agency to unsealing two indictments against the members of notorious Russian state hacker groups to undertaking a rare FBI operation to remove malware from network devices that GRU hackers had used to control a global botnet of hacked machines. Earlier this week, NSA and Cyber Command director general Paul Nakasone also told Congress that Cyber Command had sent "hunt forward" teams of US cybersecurity personnel to Eastern Europe to seek out and eliminate network vulnerabilities that hackers could exploit in both Ukraine and the networks of other allies.</p> <p>Together, it adds up to “a concerted, coordinated campaign to use all of the levers of national power against an adversary,” says J. Michael Daniel, who served as the cybersecurity coordinator in the Obama White House, advising the president on policy responses to all manner of state-sponsored hacking threats. “They're trying to both disrupt what the adversary is doing currently, and to also potentially deter them from taking further, more expansive actions in cyberspace as a result of the war in Ukraine.”</p> <p>Daniel says compared to the Obama administration he served in, it's clear the Biden White House has decided to take a far faster and harder-hitting approach to countering the Kremlin's hackers. He attributes that shift to both years of US government experience dealing with Vladimir Putin's regime and the urgency of the Ukrainian crisis, in which Russian state hackers pose an ongoing threat to Ukrainian critical infrastructure and also networks in the West, where Kremlin hackers may lash out in retaliation for sanctions against Russia and military support for Ukraine. “The Russians have made it pretty clear that signaling and small steps are not going to deter them,” says Daniels. “We've learned that we need to be more aggressive.”</p> <p>The Biden administration's ratcheted-up responses to Russian cyberattacks began in mid-February, before Russia had even launched its full-scale invasion. In a White House press conference, Deputy National Security Advisor Anne Neuberger called out Russia's GRU for a series of denial of service attacks that had pummeled Ukrainian banks over the prior week. “The global community must be prepared to shine a light on malicious cyber activity and hold actors accountable for any and all disruptive or destructive cyber activity,” Neuberger told reporters. Coming just days after the GRU's attacks, that rebuke represented one of the shortest-ever windows of time between a cyber operation and a US government statement attributing it to a particular agency—a process that has often taken months or even years.</p> <p>Last month, the Department of Justice unsealed indictments against four individual Russians in two state-linked hacker groups. One indictment named three alleged agents of Russia's FSB intelligence agency who are accused of belonging to an infamous hacker group, known as Berserk Bear or Dragonfly 2.0, that engaged in a years-long hacking spree that repeatedly targeted critical US infrastructure, including multiple breaches of power grid networks. A second indictment put a name to another highly dangerous hacking campaign, one that used a piece of malware known as Triton or Trisis to target the safety systems of the Saudi oil refinery Petro Rabigh, potentially endangering lives and leading to two shutdowns of the refinery's operations. The Justice Department pinned that attack on a staffer at the Kremlin-linked Central Scientific Research Institute of Chemistry and Mechanics (known as TsNIIKhM) in Moscow, along with other unnamed coconspirators at the same organization.</p>

At the same time, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, Justice Department, and FBI were taking on a third Russian state hacker group even more directly. In February, CISA first issued a warning that a GRU hacking group known as Sandworm—with a [track record](#) that includes everything from [triggering blackouts in Ukraine](#) to the release of the [NotPetya malware](#) that inflicted \$10 billion in damage worldwide—had assembled a botnet of hacked network devices, along with guidance on how to detect and remove the malware, known as Cyclops Blink. When that advisory led to only a 39 percent drop in the number of devices the botnet hijacked, the FBI took the rare step of actually impersonating the hackers' communications to its command-and-control machines, sending commands to remove the hackers' malware from those devices, and thus [cutting off Sandworm's access to at least part of its botnet](#).

The specific targeting of those three hacker groups—the FSB-linked Berserk Bear hackers, the TsNIICM hackers allegedly behind Triton, and GRU-linked Sandworm group—shows how the US government is intentionally taking actions to deter and disable the Russian hackers who present the greatest threat of not mere espionage or cybercrime, but targeted, disruptive cyberwarfare, says John Hultquist, who leads threat intelligence at the cybersecurity firm Mandiant and has tracked all three groups for years. "At a time when the US is bracing for potential cyberattacks from Russia, the Department of Justice has specifically indicted two of these actors and carried out an operation against the third," says Hultquist. "Those are the actors that have the history and proven capability for disruptive and destructive attacks. That's why operations have been and *should be* focused on those actors."

The Biden administration has moved carefully in its support of Ukraine to avoid any military action that could escalate into a full-blown conflict between Russia and NATO—providing Ukraine with weapons and aid but taking no active part in its fighting. Even as the US government carries out more active countermeasures in the cyber realm, those measures seem calculated to fall well below any threshold for escalation, says Jacqueline Schneider, a fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institute who focuses on escalation in cyber conflicts. "If you look at what the US is providing in terms of support to Ukraine, a Javelin missile is always going to be more of a violent means than cyber," Schneider says. "I'm very optimistic that what the US is doing is not going to lead to violent retaliation, and I also think that it is not going to be related to any escalation in the cyber domain. If Russians are going to use a cyberattack, it's because the Russians want to use a cyberattack."

The looming question is whether the executive branch's countermeasures will be enough to deter or restrict the Kremlin's most brazen cyberattack groups. But Daniel, the former Obama cyber advisor, argues that they will, at least, have some effect—that the costs they impose on Russia's hackers are worth the price for the US, even if that includes a low risk of escalation and the more significant risk of revealing sensitive intelligence sources or methods.

"They have to spend time and money rebuilding their infrastructure, and that's time and money they're not spending on disruptive activity," Daniel says. "Even if we're forcing them to use different tradecraft, to be slower, to be more cautious, then that's an effect, right? And it reduces their operational capacity and their operational effectiveness."

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HEADLINE	04/08 Anti-Ukraine disinformation hits Moldova
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/moldova-disinformation-war-ukraine/
GIST	<p>IN THE 20-SECOND TikTok video, two men wrestle inside what looks like a shop selling notebooks and iPhone cases. One of them appears to be drunk, and he is shouting "Glory to Ukraine!"—demanding the other man say it as well. Together, they stagger across the room. The video was posted to Facebook on March 4 with a caption that reads: "How Ukrainian emigrants are behaving in Moldova."</p> <p>The authenticity of the TikTok videos that are spreading rapidly on Facebook is not in doubt—although there is uncertainty about where the two men were filmed in this particular clip, because a "share the video" message hides a sign that could hint at the store's location. But the way videos like this one are amplified across different platforms point to a coordinated campaign, according to Valeriu Paşa, president and chairman of Watchdog.MD, a Moldovan think tank that has been tracking disinformation and online influence campaigns. Paşa shared 100 examples of Facebook posts, mostly videos, that he called</p>

“manipulated content about the war in Ukraine,” although 28 had been taken down by Facebook as of April 7. Out of the 72 links that were still available to view on the platform, 20 were reposts of TikTok videos.

Moldova, a small ex-Soviet nation sandwiched between Ukraine and Romania, has been suffering from what researchers describe as “an explosion” of disinformation since war broke out in Ukraine. In a type of smear campaign against Ukrainian refugees, researchers say, real videos that express anti-refugee messages are being artificially amplified across both Facebook and TikTok. Around [400,000](#) people have arrived in Moldova from Ukraine, according to the United Nations’ refugee agency, UNHCR. Around 100,000 have stayed in the country, meaning right now it is the European country with the highest number of refugees per capita.

People in Moldova say the reality in the country is starkly different from the version that this online influence campaign is promoting. There has been a huge effort to support Ukrainian refugees arriving in Moldova and help them access food and housing, says Iulian Groza, executive director of the pro-European think tank Institute for European Policies and Reforms. “Disinformation activities are actually targeting this unity and solidarity and trying to create tensions.”

The country is suffering from what its president, Maia Sandu, calls a “concerted and [organized effort](#) to divide society on the issue of refugees.” On April 7, Facebook parent Meta published a [report](#) that said it had identified government-linked actors from Russia and Belarus engaging in cyber espionage and covert influence campaigns online. Although the report did not mention Moldova, experts are concerned that influence campaigns are also taking place in the country in an attempt to destabilize one of Europe’s poorest nations, ahead of a possible invasion.

“Russia is really trying to keep Moldova in its sphere of influence,” says Peter Stano, spokesperson for foreign affairs and security policy at the European Commission, which runs a [website](#) dedicated to debunking pro-Kremlin messages. “They are also using disinformation to create confusion in the public domain and of course to promote Russian identity, Russian narratives, and the Russian model of governing the country in order to take away the support for the European direction of the country.”

The video of the two men wrestling has been shared 41,000 times on Facebook, although the post was taken down on April 7, after WIRED brought it to the platform’s attention. The TikTok account that originally posted it was [taken down](#) overnight on April 6. Posts that are shared more than 10,000 times are very unusual for Moldova, a country of just 2.6 million people, says Paşa. Watchdog.MD estimates that of the 2.1 million adults living in Moldova’s government-controlled territory, just 1.4 million use Facebook regularly, and 315,000 use TikTok.

“I would define Moldova as being in the midst of an information war,” says Vadim Pistrinciuc, executive director at Chişinău-based think tank the Institute for Strategic Initiatives.

What the people behind this campaign do most is search for authentic content, which feeds their needs, says Paşa. Once that content has been identified, usually on TikTok, it is uploaded to Facebook where fake profiles spread the video across the platform, he adds.

“They [use] tens of thousands of fake profiles and are sharing this content to different groups or simply on the timelines of these fake accounts,” Paşa says. Not only does this make a video more prominent on Facebook but it also tricks TikTok’s algorithm into showing it more on that platform. “In this way, they artificially make this content, which is usually a video, go viral.”

Meta declined to provide a statement attributable to a [named spokesperson](#) in time for publication. “We are currently assessing the situation for potential violations of our community guidelines, which prohibit inauthentic behavior,” says TikTok spokesperson Sara Mosavi.

On March 4, the TikTok user @hozyayka1997, a young woman who appears to be a Ukrainian refugee, filmed a new video. Looking straight into the camera, she launches into a stream of complaints about how

Ukrainians refugees are treated in Germany. She talks in Russian, and her face is framed with a black fur hood. At one point in the one-minute video, she turns the camera to show where she is sitting—in a dirty-white tent, filled with long benches. She talks about how the German authorities made Ukrainians wait for hours in the cold, without food or water. “Are we people or cattle?” she asks.

The video, which has been watched 650,000 times on TikTok, was reposted on Facebook by an account that posts a huge amount of pro-Russia content and has 3,700 connections. Between the video’s Facebook comments criticizing the woman for wearing makeup and fur, one user says: “Look at the profile of the person who posted the video, it’s a provocation.”

In another TikTok video, a woman who claims to be from south Moldova says refugees are demanding “luxury”—they don’t like their accommodation or their food, which they “throw on the floor.” She tells them to go back to their country if they don’t like Moldova.

When the video was reposted onto Facebook on March 10, a Moldovan flag was positioned to conceal the TikTok username of the person who originally posted it. Before it was taken down by Facebook on April 7, it was shared 15,000 times.

TikTok and Facebook are not the only platforms where disinformation has spread. Pistrinciuc points to a channel on Telegram called [Major and General](#), which has 439,000 subscribers. “They post every five minutes, so it’s clear there is a full team behind it,” he says. On April 6, the channel posted 51 times. Telegram did not reply to a request for comment.

The small country of Moldova might seem like a strange target for a disinformation campaign. It’s one of Europe’s poorest nations. It’s landlocked and therefore has no strategic ports or trade routes. But if Putin was going to push deeper into Europe, experts say, this small strip of land would likely be his next target. Like Ukraine, Moldova also has its own breakaway region, Transnistria, where around [1,500](#) Russian soldiers are stationed.

“The Russians look as if they’re preparing the ground politically for a takeover of Moldova,” says Michael Clarke, former director-general of defense think tank the Royal United Services Institute. “They’re running the same type of [disinformation] campaigns in Moldova as they’ve run in the Donbass in the southeast of Ukraine since 2014.”

However, Clarke believes an imminent invasion of Moldova is less likely as the war progresses and Russian troops shift their focus to Ukraine’s east. “Personally, I don’t think they will now achieve [a takeover of Moldova], but I think that was part of their initial design.”

Instead, there is a sense that Moldova’s fate hinges on Ukraine’s port city of [Odesa](#), just 30 miles away from Transnistria. “If [the Russians] had taken Odesa relatively easily, as they expected to, they might have just kept going and moved into Moldova, or their troops in Moldova might have moved east to actually join up with Russian troops in Odesa,” says Clarke, adding that those two scenarios looked plausible two to three weeks ago. “Taking Odesa now doesn’t look as if it’s a major priority for them. It may return as a priority, but not at the moment.”

Despite the shift of focus in Ukraine, attempts to destabilize Moldova have continued online. However, attempts to turn people in Moldova against Ukrainian refugees have not worked. Many [Moldovans](#) have welcomed Ukrainians into their homes in response to the conflict. International donors have been [funneling money](#) into the country to help them cope with integration efforts. The government is trying to better regulate disinformation on online platforms, proposing [a new law](#) on April 6.

But people aren’t holding out for these rules to solve Moldova’s disinformation problem. “Just think about the Moldovan government; it doesn’t have too much leverage to put pressure or impose rules on the platforms,” says Paşa. “Let’s be honest, this should be a joint action for the big countries.”

HEADLINE	04/10 Long shadow of 'Nigerian prince' scam
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/nigeria-cybersecurity-crime-antiblackness/
GIST	<p>IN NOVEMBER 2021, Oluwaseun Medayedupin was arrested by the Nigerian police in Lagos. An investigation found that he had been pursuing “disgruntled employees” from American companies and pushing them to release ransomware on internal enterprise servers, offering a percentage of the cut if they agreed to collaborate in the attack. This was a sophisticated social engineering scheme, far more advanced than the notorious “Nigerian prince” emails that have made the country of Nigeria synonymous with scams.</p> <p>The origins of these types of scams may be attributed to a boom in the establishment of cybercafes during the 1990s, coinciding with falling oil prices in Nigeria and a rise in unemployment. Add in a lack of national social security, and many Nigerians were forced to seek out alternative forms of employment—physical labor; gig work; and, most notoriously, cybercrime. For years, the Nigerian Police Force has been keeping tabs on domestic cybercriminals, and Nigeria’s Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) even reported several recent cases of fraudulent requests for gift cards and cryptocurrency, some of the more common methods for criminals hoping to access digital funds.</p> <p>As Medayedupin's case shows, the rampant fraud has not been isolated within national borders. The US Treasury Department currently has six Nigerian criminals on its Most Wanted cybercriminals list, while the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) reported nearly \$2.5 billion in losses tied to Nigerian-originating cybercrime in 2020.</p> <p>Historically, finding and resolving fraud has been a difficult task for individual companies. Due to a lack of adequate understanding and data regarding African markets, these companies become particularly vulnerable to international scams, leading them to rely on external providers to detect and mitigate risks. This has spurred the creation of cybersecurity products from companies such as Abnormal Security, Proofpoint, and Stripe, all of which specialize in detecting fraudulent activity on digital platforms.</p> <p>The last five years have seen an increase in tech companies internationalizing their services for emerging African markets. But as more platforms make the transition, the potential for mistakes becomes higher and the consequences more severe.</p> <p>FRAUD DETECTION SERVICES, whether for email, credit cards, banking, or other online transactions, generally use some combination of rule-based engines and deep-learning models to identify patterns of fraudulent activity. This can either take the approach of identifying known scams—writing “rules” to discover similarities between familiar scams and the transaction being observed—or of identifying unusual activity in transactions. Either approach uses some form of featurization, segmenting transactions into qualitative or quantitative data points, such as (in the case of email), sender IP address, recipient name, or country of origin. Though some types of attacks, like “Nigerian prince” scams, may be easily detected by heuristics (they often contain the same phrases or are written in all caps), attempting to detect more sophisticated attacks, such as Medayedupin’s disgruntled employee scheme, can yield inaccurate results. That is, emails that are not fraudulent can be also flagged due to attacks' similarities to legitimate transactions.</p> <p>These problems may have inspired Stripe to acquire PayStack, a startup founded by two entrepreneurs in Lagos and considered one of the leading payment services in Nigeria. Not only does a Nigerian-founded company provide an entrance into African markets, but data from PayStack's active users could prove helpful for differentiating signals in a space so riddled with fraudulent noise.</p> <p>But what about companies lacking the resources to access this data? Most security providers don’t have the engineering budget to build systems accurate enough to detect highly targeted scams or the capital to acquire African companies already working on solutions. Given the high volume of fraud originating from Nigeria, the de facto solution for many companies today has been blocklisting suspicious accounts originating from the country or training machine learning models using limited data that biases against Nigerian users. Binance reportedly blocked 281 Nigerian cryptocurrency accounts in January 2022, citing</p>

anti-money-laundering measures. PayPal has also historically banned Nigerian users from receiving payments on their platform, while Proofpoint claims to use “linguistic styles” to identify Nigerian threat actors based on email activity. In the 2021 Merchant Risk Council report, 24% of all global merchants claimed to use blocklists to handle fraud, while 18% used geographic indicators or global location data.

International perceptions of Nigerian scammers have already had negative consequences for Nigerians in tech. According to Olubukola Stella Adesina, professor of International Relations at the University of Ibadan, “international financial institutions now view paper-based Nigerian financial instruments with [skepticism]. Nigerian bank drafts and checks are not viable international financial instruments. Nigerian internet service providers (ISPs) and email providers are already being blacklisted in email-blocking blacklist systems across the internet. [S]ome companies are blocking entire internet network segments and traffic that originate from Nigeria.”

In 2021, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released a report revealing that Russia had outsourced its disinformation campaigns to local hackers from countries including Nigeria. Camille Stewart, former senior policy adviser for the Department of Homeland Security, [explained in a blog post](#) for the Council on Foreign Relations that “deeper analysis of Russia’s outsourcing of information operations to [Nigeria] could show that this is more than just an obfuscation tactic and tool to inflame racial tensions, but also an effective mechanism for targeting African diaspora communities by exploiting their connections back to the continent.”

This international response has gone beyond precaution. Discriminating against Nigerian users may save companies from actual fraudulent activity, but it comes at the cost of subjecting innocent users to high levels of scrutiny, often involving their personal data and financial history. In machine learning, the more often heuristics are applied, the more strongly the resulting data is biased, and the more likely it is that innocent users end up being policed. This feedback loop self-perpetuates—as long as the recall (the percentage of detected true attacks to all true attacks) of the fraud detection model remains sufficiently high, data generated by the model can be considered usable for training new models.

IN NIGERIA ITSELF, the meaning of “tech” is rapidly changing. In the last year, data centers have been spreading all across Africa. Lagos-founded MainOne, the largest ISP and data center operator in West Africa, was acquired by Equinix for \$320 million in 2021, with the hopes of expanding mobile broadband to the remaining 60% of West Africans not yet connected. The gig economy, from Airbnb to ride-hailing apps, offers opportunities for Nigerians to work with flexible hours. And there are now [over 716,000](#) professional developers across Africa, a 3.8% increase from the last year, with many local businesses moving online and the pandemic spurring a global demand for remote tech talent.

Still, there are many areas where this narrative reframing has not yet caught on. For years, upward mobility in Nigeria has been eyed with suspicion by Nigerian police, who have long harassed workers fitting the profile of young scammers. On [Rest of World's](#) outlet software developer Kofoworola David-Okesola described an incident in which he was ambushed by the federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), which confiscated his belongings and interrogated his online activities. “Why do you have multiple Gmail accounts?” one of the officers asked him at gunpoint. “Where did you get money to buy a MacBook? And what do you do for a living?”

The SARS police force was founded in 1992 as a masked unit to investigate and prosecute violent criminals. When cybercrime started becoming more common in the 2000s, the unit began focusing on prosecuting potential cybercriminals. Rather than investigating crimes digitally, however, the unit took to profiling primarily young Nigerian men on the streets and using methods of harassment and torture to extort those they deemed suspicious, [according to](#) Amnesty International Nigeria program manager Seun Bakare. In a [2020 report](#) by Amnesty International, the unit was found guilty of 82 counts of illegal stop and frisks, arrests, sexual harassment, and extrajudicial killings. Young men between the ages of 17 and 30 were at the highest risk of extortion, with many of the victims accosted at public venues and falsely accused of engaging in online fraud.

On October 3, 2020, a video was taken of a SARS police officer shooting a young Nigerian man in Ughelli after accusing him of cybercriminal activity. The video began trending on Twitter, resulting in nationwide protests organized with the #EndSARS hashtag. Young tech workers demanded the government investigate and prosecute all forces involved in police misconduct. In response to the public outcry, SARS was decommissioned, along with several other tactical police units. Given the government's history of inaction, however, many Nigerians are still skeptical as to whether this constitutes an adequate response to police brutality.

WHILE ARRESTS SUCH as Medayedupin's may be praised abroad, the reality is that promoting a cybersecurity culture that celebrates arrests like these only incentivizes the Nigerian police force to focus their efforts on finding and prosecuting individual criminals, rather than addressing the problem of cybercrime at large. Cybercriminals often interact in tight networks, operating thousands of servers, hosting domains, and databases distributed across an international team. Prosecuting a single criminal at a time is a drop in the bucket compared to the impact of identifying these wider networks of criminals, many of whom communicate on publicly accessible platforms such as Facebook and Discord.

Beyond the sociopolitical repercussions, continuing to criminalize and police Nigerian users necessarily impedes a shifting narrative. In response to freezing 281 Nigerian cryptocurrency accounts, Binance CEO Changpeng Zhao [issued a public statement](#) that revealed the company's continued wariness toward the Nigerian market. "User security remains our top priority," he wrote. "We love and are devoted to our Nigerian community, but we must ensure that our users are safe." Nigerian accounts also remain banned from Coinbase despite the country's status as the leading market for venture capital in Africa.

With the rapid growth of Nigeria's tech ecosystem, young workers today are facing far more lucrative opportunities than in the past. Mobile data adoption is up, and as the successes of Paystack and Flutterwave have indicated, users are more willing to trust digital payment systems. Yet cybersecurity providers remain focused on fraud as a heuristics-based problem, building solutions with bias against an entire demographic.

Though heuristics can work in fraud detection, they must be sufficiently tuned to not flag numerous non-suspicious transactions. It's clear that many security providers today are not putting in the work to distinguish between non-suspicious activity from Nigerian accounts and the behavioral patterns of scammers. Fraud detection services continue to screen transaction data by GeoIP, block Nigerian-originating users, and advocate for scam-baiting and vigilantism as the primary means of addressing cybercrime. Stronger indicators of fraud, such as IP history, failed verifications, mismatched user data, or activity inconsistent with user history—detections based on user *behavior* rather identity—can provide a more holistic way to identify fraudulent transactions.

Beyond the bigotry of subjecting entire ethnicities to large-scale policing, fixating on short-term gains is an ineffective strategy for actually reducing incidents of cybercrime. Though a large volume of attacks may originate from Nigeria, overfitting models to parameters not associated with cases of fraud simply yields poor detection. It may be easier for companies to lean on tried-and-true heuristics, but these methods are not sustainable in a rapidly developing ecosystem. Companies that continue to address fraud with quick patches will lose out on customers from the largest emerging markets in Africa—as it turns out, users are also aware of the repercussions of using services that actively discriminate against them.

It's evident how a biased mentality arises from the industry: according to the 2020 (ISC)2 workforce study, only 9% of cybersecurity professionals self-identified as Black. Within an environment so lacking in diverse leadership, there are few incentives to change the status quo. Regardless, the narrative must change. Barring the harms of perpetuating systemic racism within the United States' justice system, increasing surveillance of African and African diasporic individuals will only further reduce access to financial and communication channels for the individuals who need them the most.

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SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/cities-take-lead-setting-rules-around-how-ai-is-used-11649448031?mod=hp_list_pos1
GIST	<p>As cities and states roll out algorithms to help them provide services like policing and traffic management, they are also racing to come up with policies for using this new technology.</p> <p>AI, at its worst, can disadvantage already marginalized groups, adding to human-driven bias in hiring, policing and other areas. And its decisions can often be opaque—making it difficult to tell how to fix that bias, as well as other problems.</p> <p>Cities are looking at a number of solutions to these problems. Some require disclosure when an AI model is used in decisions, while others mandate audits of algorithms, track where AI causes harm or seek public input before putting new AI systems in place.</p> <p>It will take time for cities and local bureaucracies to build expertise in these areas and figure out how to craft the best regulations, says Joanna Bryson, a professor of ethics and technology at the Hertie School in Berlin. But such efforts could provide a model for other cities, and even nations that are trying to craft standards of their own, she says. “People tend to notice what works and then try to shift efforts there.”</p> <p>Here are some ways cities are redefining how AI will work within their borders and beyond.</p> <p>Explaining the algorithms: Amsterdam and Helsinki</p> <p>One of the biggest complaints against AI is that it makes decisions that can’t be explained, which can lead to complaints about arbitrary or even biased results.</p> <p>To let their citizens know more about the technology already in use in their cities, Amsterdam and Helsinki collaborated on websites that document how each city government uses algorithms to deliver services. The registry includes information on the data sets used to train an algorithm, a description of how an algorithm is used, how public servants use the results, the human oversight involved and how the city checks the technology for problems like bias.</p> <p>Amsterdam has six algorithms fully explained—with a goal of 50 to 100—on the registry website, including how the city’s automated parking-control and trash-complaint reports work. Helsinki, which is only focusing on the city’s most advanced algorithms, also has six listed on its site, with another 10 to 20 left to put up.</p> <p>“We needed to assess the risk ourselves,” says Linda van de Fliert, an adviser at Amsterdam’s Chief Technology Office. “And we wanted to show the world that it is possible to be transparent.”</p> <p>The registries don’t give citizens personalized information explaining their individual bills or fees. But they provide citizens with a way to give feedback on algorithms, and the name, city department and contact information of the person responsible for the deployment of a particular algorithm. So far, at least one Amsterdam man who was displeased about getting an automated text about an overdue electricity bill used the registry to find out why the government contacted him.</p> <p>Ms. van de Fliert has lost count of how many cities have reached out to learn more about the registry, and says she hopes that others pick up the project.</p> <p>“It doesn’t make sense to do this just for Amsterdam and Helsinki,” Ms. van de Fliert says. “We all have the same needs.”</p> <p>Auditing the AI: New York</p> <p>Some cities are looking at ways to remove potential bias from algorithms. In January, the New York City Council passed a law—to go into effect in 2023—covering companies that sell AI software that screens potential employees. The businesses must obtain audits to ensure they don’t discriminate against job candidates on the basis of race, sex or national origin. The new rule also requires companies using AI for hiring or promotion decisions to disclose its use to job seekers and employees.</p>

“Hiring is a really high-stakes domain,” says Julia Stoyanovich, an associate professor of computer science and engineering at New York University and the director of the NYU Tandon Center for Responsible AI, who consulted on the regulation. “And we are using a lot of tools without any oversight.”

The New York bill isn’t exhaustive, says Dr. Stoyanovich—for one thing, it doesn’t detail what constitutes an audit. She suggests making the AI display something like nutritional labels on food, with the data points used in the hiring decision broken down like nutrients and ingredients. She says ensuring that the audits are helpful to the public will be the next challenge.

“We want to be careful about how these audits are done, who does them, and what they contain,” she says. “Companies will want to do less rather than more.”

Giving communities more power: Santa Clara County

Another effort to cut down on bias is giving communities a say in how law enforcement uses AI. Working with the American Civil Liberties Union, California’s Santa Clara County passed a law mandating community control over police surveillance (or CCOPS) in 2017. The law requires any agency within Santa Clara County’s jurisdiction that wants to use surveillance technology to submit it for public input at an open Board of Supervisors meeting.

The agency must present a policy detailing how the technology would be used, including how any data collected would be stored or shared. If the Board of Supervisors approves the purchase, the agency is responsible for a yearly impact report to prove the technology meets agreed-upon specifications.

Since the Santa Clara law passed, the Board of Supervisors has approved the use of roughly 100 technologies. The one exception: a proposal on facial-recognition technology, because of concerns including the potential for false positives.

“I’m a tech enthusiast,” says Joe Simitian, a member of the county’s Board of Supervisors. “But there was significant potential for this to be abused without a robust set of policies.”

There are now 22 cities with a version of CCOPS on the books that covers 17.7 million people, according to Chad Marlow, a senior advocacy and policy counsel at the ACLU who is also overseeing the CCOPS effort. Community-control laws cover all sorts of police surveillance that doesn’t include AI, but several cities’ laws explicitly address or ban facial-recognition technology. Each city ends up tweaking the law for its specific needs.

Cooperating with other cities: Amsterdam, Barcelona and London

A group of cities are pushing an AI effort to help educate other cities on best practices on deploying AI systems more effectively and ethically. That is what Amsterdam, Barcelona and London hope to achieve with the Global Observatory of Urban AI.

“We want to become a knowledge source for both cities and researchers,” says Laia Bonet, Barcelona’s deputy mayor for digital transitions, mobility and international relations.

The three cities agreed on five principles—fairness and nondiscrimination, transparency and openness, safety and cybersecurity, privacy protection, and sustainability—that lawmakers need to consider when procuring or building AI systems. To show how those principles look in practice, the Observatory plans to put out research this year, including an atlas of best practices for AI already in place in cities around the world, which will include [Amsterdam’s guidelines](#) on what cities should demand from private AI providers and [Barcelona’s system](#) for creating recommendations systems for social services. Other papers will explore how the technology was deployed and how cities have navigated the relationship between public and private.

These principles and papers are meant to help cities develop their own standards around all AI applications. Even with this collaboration, there are different approaches in the Observatory’s founding

cities. London, for example, supports using facial-recognition technology in some cases, while Barcelona and Amsterdam don't. Ms. Bonet says the cities agree on how important their goals are and that sharing information can create better AI across the world.

"We have tried to ensure that every step we do is a step toward a just transition," Ms. Bonet says.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	04/10 Taliban poetry changing; some say a sham
SOURCE	https://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/ts/news/world/2022/04/10/from-blood-and-bombs-to-buds-of-hope-taliban-poetry-is-changing-its-tone-but-some-say-its-a-sham.html
GIST	<p>The Taliban's poetry was instrumental in the Islamist militant's conquest of Afghanistan. It was a front largely ignored by the Afghan government and coalition forces.</p> <p>But maybe it shouldn't have been.</p> <p>"The Taliban's poetry was so effective," said Hamdullah Wesal, a Pashto poet and literary analyst. "It would literally make a person tie bombs around his body and blow himself off."</p> <p>Struggling to govern, the former guerrilla fighters are now expecting the poetry to help them reach out to the public.</p> <p>On Jan 29, the Taliban held their first major poetry recitation show, called "The Spring," on the country's national TV channel, attended by the so called caretaker government's foreign minister, Amir Khan Mutaqi, and chief spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, among others.</p> <p>The tone, however, had dramatically changed.</p> <p>Abdul Aziz Azizi, a Taliban poet who used to encourage suicide bombers to "engulf" opponents with "fire and smoke," sang a song about hope in the show. "The buds of hope have blossomed," Azizi recited melodiously on stage, his words echoed by another chanter.</p> <p>The Taliban's poetry, sung voluntarily by the group's members and their sympathizers, has shifted from mercilessness to compassion as they try to police the fractured country.</p> <p>Ahmadullah Wasiq, the Taliban deputy spokesperson who is now the head of Radio and Television of Afghanistan (RTA), opened his remarks at the show with a famous line. "Life is even too short for loving," he recited. "I've no idea how others get time to hate."</p> <p>For families whose loved ones were killed in the group's indiscriminate suicide bombings, his words may well have sounded unconvincing.</p> <p>Poetry and <i>taranas</i>, a kind of a cappella song charged with strong emotions, not only helped the Taliban communicate with the masses but they played a vital role in mobilizing youth against the coalition forces and the government they backed.</p> <p>"We have a deep connection with poetry," Anas Haqqani says of the Taliban at the poetry show. "It has played a nearly 70 per cent role in our fight." Haqqani, a senior Taliban official, is also the younger brother of Sirajuddin Haqqani, the interior minister who is on the FBI's most-wanted list with a bounty of \$10 million (U.S.).</p> <p>By stripping music from the songs and avoiding romance, the Taliban made their <i>taranas</i> and poetry accessible to everyone across the religious spectrum.</p>

Religious conservatives, who shared the Taliban's strict interpretation of sharia law, saw romantic poetry and music as provocative and un-Islamic. Yet they had no problem with the Taliban *taranas* — the melodious chants often produced by using Auto-Tune software.

The clerics and ultra-religious people substituted their cellphones' ringtones with these *taranas* as they saw the former as a type of music.

"More people listened to the Taliban's *taranas* than it was thought," says Azizuddin Yousafzai, a professor in the language and literature department of Balkh University in northern Afghanistan. "They filled in the place of music for those with strong religious inclinations."

The *taranas* and poetry were also a good way for the Taliban to communicate who they were and what they wanted, according to Yousafzai. "The poets cheered their comrades' sacrifices, showed their commitment, and pointed out the mistakes the coalition forces and the government they backed made." "Drone has hit," goes one *tarana* on a Taliban YouTube channel. "The kohled eyelashes and soil have mingled, burned."

"It is the time of revolution," chants a Taliban on YouTube, calling a friend to see him for the last time. "I know not if I will get martyred, injured, or enchained."

Taliban poets also glorified their way of jihad and the simple deadly tools they used in their conquest. "Break the pride of arrogant NATO, O antichrist-killer jug," goes another *tarana*, referring to the cooking oil gallon which was used in improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The [homemade bombs](#), made of fertilizers, a pressure plate and plastic cans of oil, were one of the most effective, yet indiscriminate, weapons of the insurgent group. [Thousands of civilians were blindsided and killed by these IEDs](#).

Taking over the country at a lightning speed last August, following the withdrawal of U.S. forces, the Taliban has to rule the war-weary country of nearly 40 million. Ethnic and religious divisions, harsh economic sanctions, brain drain, unemployment and destitution, just to name a few, are among the challenges that caught them unprepared.

Poetry, whose power they know well, is something they hope to help them unify the [country](#) and garner people's support.

"No one has to be alienated," recited Haqqani at the poetry show. Haqqani, who was released [in a prisoner exchange](#) ahead of the [Doha peace talks](#) in 2019, calls himself a poet. "Why should anyone be forced into infidelity?"

"Whether it is a Pashtun or a Hazara, a Tajik or a Turkmen, an Arab or a Gujar," recited Faqeer Mohammed Darvish, the iconic Taliban poet and *tarana* singer, at the show, referring to different ethnic groups in the country. "They have all become the true sons of the land," he added, claiming that the country is now safe for everyone.

However, the Taliban's words, whether a politician's or a poet's, do not match their actions. Their cabinet, for instance, has [not given a single chair to women and ethnic minorities](#). Government ministers are almost all Taliban leaders and Pashtuns, members of the largest ethnic group in the country and the one to which most Taliban belong. The [former Afghan forces are being killed or disappeared](#) and [women protesting for their rights are detained](#). They recently started [a concerning house-to-house sweep](#).

The Taliban, meanwhile, fail to recognize that poetry could be a double-edged blade.

"My city turned into a cemetery," recited Idress Zwak, who seemed to be the only bare-headed and clean-shaven poet in "The Spring." "The cemeteries have gone bigger than the cities," he continued. "How much more will we lose in the foreign war?"

	<p>“The foreign war” the Taliban brought home by providing refuge to Osama bin Laden, the al-Qaida leader, who orchestrated the 9/11 attacks.</p> <p>The audience, composed almost entirely of Taliban, went quiet and froze.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 IS morphs, grows in Pakistan, Afghanistan
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/islamic-state-morphs-grows-pakistan-afghanistan-84007697
GIST	<p>JALALABAD, Afghanistan -- Basheer was a young Taliban fighter barely out of his teens when the Islamic State group took over his village in eastern Afghanistan, nearly eight years ago. The militants rounded up villagers identified as Taliban and killed them, often beheading them, forcing their families to watch.</p> <p>Basheer escaped and lived in hiding during the following years when IS controlled several districts in Nangarhar province. Over time, he rose in the Taliban ranks.</p> <p>Now known as Engineer Basheer, he is the Taliban intelligence chief in eastern Afghanistan, with a leading role in the campaign to crush IS. He hasn't forgotten the atrocities he saw in his home district of Kot.</p> <p>“I can't explain their cruelty in words, whatever comes into your mind, they have done more than that,” he told The Associated Press in a recent interview at his headquarters in Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar.</p> <p>Since coming to power in Afghanistan eight months ago, the Taliban have touted their success in repressing the Islamic State group, but the militants have expanded into neighboring Pakistan, stepping up attacks there. Analysts say IS has morphed into a borderless terrorist group, one of the deadliest in a region that has spawned many violent, radical organizations.</p> <p>In northwest Pakistan, the impact is brutally clear. The remains of an IS suicide bomber are still visible on the once ornate walls of a mosque, weeks after he blew himself up, killing more than 60 worshippers as they prayed. IS identified the bomber as an Afghan from Kabul.</p> <p>The March 4 bombing at the Kusha Kisaldar Shiite mosque in the old city of Peshawar stunned Pakistanis, deepening their fear of the resurgence of terror attacks in their country, after a steady decline in the past decade.</p> <p>The rise in attacks began last year and is accelerating, said Amir Rana, executive director of the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies, an independent think tank that monitors militant activity in Pakistan.</p> <p>By late March this year, Pakistan had seen 52 attacks by militants, compared to 35 in the same period last year, according to the institute's data. The attacks have also gotten deadlier. So far this year in Pakistan, 155 people have been killed in such attacks, compared to 68 last year.</p> <p>The worst have been claimed by a ruthless Islamic State affiliate, known Islamic State in Khorasan Province or IS-K.</p> <p>Meanwhile, IS attacks appear to have declined in Afghanistan.</p> <p>IS-K first emerged in 2014 in eastern Afghanistan. By 2019, it held significant territory in Nangarhar province and had pushed into neighboring Kunar province. The U.S. military waged a massive air campaign against it, including targeting a suspected IS hideout with America's largest conventional bomb, known as the “mother of all bombs.”</p>

But IS survived, and it presented the greatest security challenge to the Taliban when they seized power in Afghanistan last August.

IS-K is a longtime enemy of the Taliban. The Taliban espouse a harsh interpretation of Islamic law and often used suicide attacks in their nearly 20-year insurgency against the United States and its Afghan allies. But they often blend tribal traditions with religious edicts and have reached out to Shiites. IS, meanwhile, opposes any group that does not accept its more radical, deeply anti-Shiite ideology and is notorious for atrocities meant to spread fear. IS, unlike the Taliban, see their battle as one to establish a unified Muslim world under a caliphate.

The Taliban responded with their characteristic heavy hand, sweeping through suspected IS strongholds. In October and November, residents reported bodies hanging from trees. They were told they were IS militants.

Basheer says the Taliban have succeeded in reining in the group.

“We got control of all those areas ... Right now, there might be some people who hid in houses (but) they don’t have any area under their control. There is no Daesh,” he said, using the Arabic acronym for IS.

He said IS-K fighters are at a disadvantage because the Taliban are longtime masters of guerrilla warfare. The IS-K has no tactics that the Taliban don’t already know or haven’t used, he said.

Some militant watchers also say the Taliban’s deep reach inside Afghan villages and links to mosques and madrassas in even the smallest hamlets have reduced the space for IS to operate.

Since the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan last year, Washington’s ability to gather intelligence on IS has been drastically degraded, according to senior U.S. military officials.

The region is also increasingly inhospitable to America. Political turmoil has fueled anti-U.S. sentiment in Pakistan. In Afghanistan, the Taliban are imposing a rule that harks to their harsh government of the late 1990s. China is a major player in the region, quickly outstripping U.S. influence.

IS-K is not the only extremist group in the region. Others include Lashkar-e-Taiba, which is largely India-focused, China’s Uyghur rebels of the East Turkestan group and Central Asia’s rebel Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

The threat from IS has only become more fluid and difficult to control.

Dr. Amira Jadoon, assistant professor at the Combating Terrorism Center at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, said IS-K is weaker than it was in 2019. But it has morphed from an insurgency to a typical terrorist group, a subtle but important difference, she said.

“It’s now a stronger terrorist group than it was in 2019, but perhaps a weaker ‘insurgency’ compared to its earlier peak years, since it lacks the same level of territorial control and is not controlling any civilian populations,” Jadoon said.

A February U.N. report estimated the number of IS-K fighters at around 4,000 and said it “enjoys more freedom than at any time in recent history.”

Not everyone agrees. Bill Roggio, whose Long War Journal tracks militant movements, said the Taliban sweep to power prompted some former member of the group who had defected to IS-K to return to the Taliban fold.

“The Taliban received a major boost after its victory in Afghanistan,” said Roggio, who is also a senior fellow at the conservative Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

	<p>Unlike in Afghanistan, IS-K has not tried to lay claim to territory in Pakistan.</p> <p>Instead, it has often piggy-backed on well-established anti-Shiite groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which has claimed scores of brutal attacks on Pakistan's Shiite Muslim minority. In both countries, the extreme Sunni Muslim group reviles Shiites as heretics and has targeted them mercilessly.</p> <p>Rana, from the Pakistani militancy monitoring group, said IS likely aims to stir up tensions between Islamabad and Kabul. But he said Pakistani authorities still consider the Pakistani Taliban, a homegrown anti-government group, the main threat.</p> <p>"This is quite a naïve and simplistic view," he said, warning that IS attacks are likely to only increase.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 GAO: increasing risk dirty bomb attack
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/emergency-preparedness/gao-warns-of-increasing-risks-of-a-dirty-bomb-attack/
GIST	<p>The risks of a dirty bomb attack are increasing and the consequences could be devastating. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported in 2019 that a dirty bomb using radioactive materials could trigger mass evacuations and have socioeconomic costs of billions of dollars. For example, an accident at a hospital in 2019 involving a small quantity of radioactive materials resulted in clean-up and other costs of \$150 million for that building alone. Many GAO recommendations to reduce the risks of these materials have not yet been implemented.</p> <p>Numerous incidents indicate weaknesses in controls over radioactive materials that could be used in a dirty bomb. Recent security threats have raised concerns that radioactive materials could be stolen and used in a domestic attack. For example, in April 2019, a technician was arrested after stealing three radioactive devices from his workplace in Arizona. According to a court filing, the technician intended to release the radioactive materials at a shopping mall, but local police and the FBI arrested him before he could do so. From 2010 through 2019, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) reported over 2,000 nuclear materials events, which included instances of lost or stolen radioactive materials, radiation overexposures, leaks of radioactive materials, and other events. Furthermore, officials from the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), which provides enhanced security to facilities with highrisk radioactive materials, told GAO that there is increasing interest among adversaries in using radioactive materials for making a dirty bomb.</p> <p>Vulnerabilities arise because NRC's security requirements do not take into account the most devastating potential effects, including billions of dollars in cleanup costs, and deaths and injuries from chaotic evacuations. In addition, weaknesses in licensing make it relatively easy for bad actors to obtain small quantities of high-risk radioactive materials, which could be dangerous in the wrong hands. Given the risks associated with these materials, which are in widespread use, it may be time to consider greater reliance on alternatives, when feasible. Previously, GAO has recommended that Congress consider this matter.</p> <p>NRC, NNSA, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and others play a role in radioactive material security. Agencies have implemented several GAO recommendations for improving radioactive material security. For example, DHS strengthened the vetting for imports of radioactive materials. However, as of April 2022, NRC has not yet implemented a number of key recommendations to address vulnerabilities that GAO has identified.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Moscow diplomatically recognizes Taliban
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/in-diplomatic-first-and-win-taliban-envoy-gets-recognized-in-moscow/

GIST	<p>KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghanistan’s ruling party, the Taliban, has been accredited with a diplomatic representative in Russia for the first time.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the Taliban Foreign Ministry announced on Saturday that the embassy in Moscow had been officially handed over to the control of its representative.</p> <p>According to the statement, the former ambassador had to stop working. A diplomat named Jamal Gharwal is starting as charge d’affaires. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had recently confirmed the accreditation of a Taliban representative, according to the Interfax news agency.</p> <p>Internationally, no state has yet recognized the Taliban government. The militant Islamist group had returned to power in Afghanistan in August 2021. Since then, the Taliban have severely restricted human rights. Girls are still not allowed to attend secondary schools, almost eight months after their takeover.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	04/10 Manhole fires NYC Times Square
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/10/us/new-york-times-square-manhole-fires/index.html
GIST	<p>Multiple manhole fires occurred in New York’s Times Square Sunday evening, authorities said, causing crowds to flee the area.</p> <p>No injuries have been reported from the incident that took place shortly before 7 p.m., according to police and fire officials. Social media videos show a number of people running away after reportedly hearing a loud bang or explosion.</p> <p>Firefighters searched the surrounding areas for any elevated carbon monoxide levels, the New York City Fire Department said. Officials have yet to confirm the type of manhole covers – gas, water, sewer or subway – that caught fire.</p> <p>Two manhole covers were affected, and the cause was cable failure, according to Karl-Erik Stromsta, spokesperson for energy provider Con Edison.</p> <p>One of the two had been part of an explosion, Stromsta said, while the second was found smoking.</p> <p>There have been no reports of customer outages or injuries, he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Drought threatens Southwest hydropower
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/drought-hydropower-southwestern-us-glen-canyon-dam/
GIST	<p>NEWS THAT LAKE Powell, a reservoir on the border of Arizona and Utah, is slowly but surely drying up has spread far and wide. Behind the 1,320-megawatt Glen Canyon Dam and power station, Lake Powell plays an important role in providing power for some 3 million customers in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.</p> <p>But this year, the reservoir has hit a historic low, due to ongoing drought conditions in the region that have been attributed, at least in part, to climate change. The dam may even stop producing power if the situation continues to worsen, and this issue is not an isolated one in the American Southwest.</p> <p>The Colorado River, an important source for many dams and power plants in the region, has been wracked by drought for the past 22 years—some research suggests that it is subject to the worst drought the area has seen in 1,200 years. Further, according to the US Drought Monitor, as of March 29, 88.75 percent of the Western US has been experiencing a moderate drought or worse. According to staff members at the United</p>

States Bureau of Reclamation, other dams in this be-droughted part of the country are seeing similar effects—though the officials also noted that each case is different.

According to Becki Bryant, the USBR's Upper Colorado Basin public affairs officer, there are two main factors that impact hydro production. The first is the amount of water that passes through a dam's generators. The second is the depth of the body of water that feeds the dams. Deeper bodies of water have more force behind the water rushing through and spinning the turbines of a generator.

Lake Powell and the Glen Canyon Dam make up an extreme case in the US. The dam's minimum power pool (MPP)—the point at which hydropower can no longer be produced at the dam—is around 1,064 meters. Currently, it is sitting at 1,075 meters. [Projections suggest](#) that there is a 23 to 27 percent chance of hitting the MPP each year from 2023 to 2026, according to Bryant. Other parts of the Colorado River Basin, which is home to a few other dams, are being impacted by the drought as well. The 22-year drought has decreased the amount of energy produced in the area by 13.1 percent compared to the average annual energy production in the 12 years preceding it (from 1988 to 1999). "It is difficult to predict actual impacts beyond 2023, but this trend is anticipated to continue," Bryant said.

California Dreaming

In news that should shock no one in the state, [California is also dry](#). However, the nature of California—which is home to many hydro operations—is somewhat different from Arizona, according to Steven Melavic, chief of power operations with the USBR's Central Valley Project. Cary Fox, a team lead with the USBR, said that if the Shasta Powerplant's reservoir were entirely full, it would be a 710-megawatt plant. Currently, the water in its reservoir is low enough that it's expected to produce a low of around 380 megawatts by the end of the fall.

California's reservoirs can be quickly replenished, however, thanks to wet storms coming from the Pacific Ocean. "The reservoirs can rebound in a heartbeat. It's a different kind of dynamic," Melavic told Ars.

But Fox noted that the reservoirs really only have winter and fall to fill up again with precipitation. "If it does not rain or snow in the winter, that's it. We kind of have one season ... This year, it didn't happen," Fox said.

Melavic added that in the past decade California has had more dry years than wet. It's hard to say what the future holds for its reservoirs and dams, but for this year, at least, the state isn't expected to get better. "The averages have been against us over the last 10 years or so—pretty dry," Melavic said.

Hoover Dam, a US landmark on the border of Arizona and Nevada, also isn't firing on all cylinders. Nevada, much like other parts of the Southwest, is in the grips of [drought](#). As of February, Lake Mead, which provides the dam water, was sitting at an elevation of [325 meters](#). According to the USBR, the dam is expected to stop producing power at around 289.56 meters.

Hoover Dam's normal capacity is 2,074 megawatts, according to an email from the USBR. As of last week, it was sitting at around 1,500 megawatts—a decrease of around 25 percent. A normal year for the dam would see 4.5 billion kilowatt-hours produced. Last year, production decreased by 22 percent to 3.5 billion kilowatt-hours, the USBR said.

What's Next?

Dominique Bain is the coauthor of a [2018 paper](#) on the impacts of drought and [climate change](#) on hydropower in the Southwestern US. (She wrote it as a PhD student at Northern Arizona University's School of Earth Sciences and Environmental Sustainability.)

The paper used modeling and Western Electricity Coordinating Council data to answer a question: What would happen to power production if the Southwest were to lose Lake Mead and Lake Powell? The research was based on what we knew in 2016 and 2017, but Bain noted that things have changed somewhat since then. Some coal plants have retired, natural gas is cheaper than anticipated, and there is more [solar power](#). Also, battery tech has not developed as much as expected.

In any case, if the US were to lose Lake Mead and Lake Powell, the Southwest would still have power, but there would be trade-offs, Bain said. One thing hydro does particularly well is stabilize other forms of electricity production that rely on outside factors—solar works only when it's sunny out; wind works only when it's windy.

For example, Hoover Dam is often used to balance large solar operations in California and Arizona. When the sun is high during the day and loads are relatively low, Hoover doesn't produce much power. But when the sun begins to set and loads increase with people returning home, watching TV, and making dinner, solar doesn't produce as much power, and the dam produces more. This would be lost with Lake Mead.

According to Bain, a few things could be done to make up for a decrease in hydropower. Natural gas could help fill in the gaps, though this comes with obvious issues. She said that, at least for Hoover Dam, installing pumped storage hydro could work. This would involve using solar power (which can often be produced in [excessive amounts](#)) during the day to bring water at the bottom of the dam up to the top to run through it again. This does use energy, and evaporation can still result in water loss. But it means that water can be recycled for use later in the day when solar power isn't at peak performance.

Another option would be to invest more in developing better utility storage [batteries](#), which could store the power that the dam generates for later use. Bain noted that back in 2012 through 2014, grid-level storage batteries were anticipated to be a big deal, but they haven't yet materialized, though [efforts have been made](#). Bain added that batteries often have a limited lifespan, 10 years or less, and they are generally quite small. It's possible that in the future, we will have better battery storage, but right now, "We're just not seeing that," Bain told Ars.

According to Bryant at the USBR, several measures have been undertaken in the Colorado River Basin. Though many of them were a part of regular maintenance and repairs, a few were performed directly in response to the drought. At Glen Canyon Dam, the turbine runners (the part of the machine that generates power by spinning with the movement of the water) saw a design update to make them more efficient, for instance. The USBR also continues to monitor the river system.

"Protecting the elevations of Lake Mead and Lake Powell remains a top priority while working collaboratively with the Basin States and water managers toward solutions to protect the vitality of the Colorado River," Bryant said.

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HEADLINE	04/10 'Mystery boom' Orcas Island studied
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/tech/science/environment/studying-orcas-island-mystery-boom-demonstrates-research-tools/281-f54ab854-bde6-458d-b08f-6c9ceaa0ce0
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — In March, the Pacific Northwest Seismic Network (PNSN) shared a blog post about their efforts to identify the source of a "mystery boom" on Orcas Island.</p> <p>Now, they're sharing more about their collaboration with the Cascades Volcano Observatory and about how increasing data points are making it easier to gain a timely understanding of seismic events.</p> <p>PNSN's inquiry into a reported "mystery boom" on Orcas Island started after an email from a now-retired seismologist living in the area, who woke up to shaking and wanted to know if there'd been an earthquake.</p> <p>"There was a signal on our seismographs, but it was not the kind of signal that's generated by an earthquake," said Paul Bodin with the PNSN. "So it wasn't something in the rocks that moved- the usual tectonic earthquake. Instead, it had the signature of something acoustic in the air- like an explosion in the air, a firecracker or something like that, that causes a pressure wave in the atmosphere, and you can tell the difference. What happens is that a pressure wave hits a place where there's a seismic station and it shakes</p>

the building or whatever and that registers on our equipment, but not like an earthquake. It's a different kind of signature."

Bodin said a wide variety of things can cause this to happen, with varying degrees of impact. Anything from a truck going by to animals walking by to a tree falling can register.

"In order for us to understand- what are earthquakes and what are ground motions, we have to look at this whole mess of stuff, so what we do is we have a lot of automatic processes to identify what we expect to be earthquakes," Bodin said. "In a case like...what happened in the Orcas island case was, there weren't earthquakes and we knew that pretty quickly actually."

Bodin said PNSN works closely with the Cascades Volcano Observatory, the US Geological Survey's office in Vancouver, Washington. He says for the past few years they've been adding both seismic and infrasound stations around Mount Rainier- and they were able to share some of that infrasound data.

"He wrote back, and said, well, yeah, and showed us data showing, there is this weird signal and using my seismic stations as an array I can tell the signal's coming from the north, so it kind of fits- but it's not at the right time," Bodin said.

Through [continued inquiry](#), PNSN concluded that the source of the boom was likely a man-made device like an amateur explosive- perhaps, a firework. Investigating that falls under the purview of other organizations and authorities.

But Bodin said the assessment they were able to do is a testament to the tools that are now available to closely analyze seismic activity. PNSN, operated by the University of Washington and University of Oregon, has continued to add new seismic stations across the region, now numbering in the hundreds.

The hope is that more Washington residents will educate themselves on the processes and available data involved - in line with the Network's mission to provide accurate, fast information about earthquakes and ground motions to scientists, engineers, planners and community members.

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HEADLINE	04/09 Missing ice cream sandwich at Masters
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/georgia-peach-ice-cream-sandwich-masters-11649518731?mod=hp_listb_pos3
GIST	<p>AUGUSTA, Ga.—There’s usually a natural reprieve on offer here for a warm, sunny day at the Masters. It’s the Georgia Peach Ice Cream Sandwich. It’s cold. It’s delightful. It’s a tribute to the fruit that’s famous in the state.</p> <p>It’s also missing from this year’s Masters.</p> <p>“Everybody’s talking about it,” said Lee Dickey, whose family’s Dickey Farms grows peaches in Musella, Ga.</p> <p>But there’s one enterprise notably mum about it: Augusta National Golf Club.</p> <p>The Georgia Peach Ice Cream Sandwich’s absence from the concession stands this year is conspicuous. But the reason why remains somewhat mysterious, with concession stand employees having referred to it as a supply-chain issue.</p> <p>At a club so tight-lipped it makes mimes look loquacious, there hasn’t been a clear explanation for its disappearance. A spokeswoman for the club said it does not discuss its vendor relationships.</p> <p>Augusta National’s vendors are similarly reluctant to provide answers. The company that previously helped make the sandwiches says it no longer makes the sandwiches and directed further questions to</p>

Augusta National. Another ice cream manufacturer referred the question to someone at the club, which repeated its policy of not commenting on such matters.

That supply-chain explanation was especially curious to one very interested group of people: Georgia peach farmers. They say Georgia's peach crop has been phenomenal in recent years. People inside the Georgia peach industry haven't seen any widespread issues that would credibly explain their disappearance.

"There has been no shortage of Georgia peaches for the last few years," Lanier Pearson, whose family owns Pearson Farm in Fort Valley, Ga., wrote in an email.

"It's surprising and disappointing," Dickey said.

The Georgia Peach Ice Cream Sandwich has traditionally been made up of peach ice cream in between a couple of sugar cookies. The most important and rarest ingredient in the supply-chain for that would seemingly be Georgia peaches. They're juicy local delicacies, subject to the whims of weather and crops that can vary by season.

Peaches can also be finicky to grow. A cool spring allows for good blooms. A frost, though, can kill those blooms. They require a careful balance between cold and freezing, and that thin line is what makes Georgia's climate a hotbed for growing them.

"It's just a really good environment for growing tasty fruit," said Brett Blaauw, an assistant professor and peach entomologist at the University of Georgia.

It's possible, although not common, for chills to decimate the peach crop in the state. It's still too early to know what this year's peach season will look like. But what matters for peach ice cream now in 2022 is the peach crop in 2021.

This time of year, when the fruit is out of season, peach ice cream—the type made from real peaches—is typically made with fruit from the prior season. Farmers purée the peaches and freeze them for later use. Dickey, whose family farm has been growing peaches in the state since 1897, said they froze 4,000 gallons of peaches to make ice cream during non-harvest months. That's the product of tens of thousands of peaches.

They had such an extraordinary number of peaches to freeze because last year's peach crop happened to be excellent.

"Last year we might've had too many peaches," said Jeff Cook, the peach agent in Peach County and Taylor County who works with the University of Georgia.

"We haven't experienced any supply issues with the ingredients for the ice cream," Lanier Pearson wrote.

But unraveling why the dessert treats are gone despite the state rolling in peaches is even more difficult because it can be difficult to unravel who even makes them.

Augusta National is notoriously hush-hush about its business operations, and that includes the identity of its business partners who make ice cream sandwiches. In the past, the Georgia Peach Ice Cream Sandwiches had been produced with a Nashville-based bakery called Christie Cookie Co.—it wasn't a secret because the company's name had been on the back of the packaging. However, a spokesman for its parent company said Christie Cookie Co. does not make them.

"Christie Cookies is not the producer of the Georgia Peach Ice Cream Sandwich at the Masters," the spokesman wrote in an email. "In fact, our Christie Cookie business is not experiencing any supply chain issues at this time."

	<p>The spokesman noted that Christie Cookies and the Masters continue to enjoy a long-term relationship. Indeed, Christie Cookie-branded cookies can be found at this year's Masters. At last year's Masters, the wrapping of the ice-cream sandwiches also appeared different than when it was made by Christie Cookie. The company referred further questions to Augusta National.</p> <p>Speculation among Masters insiders about the identity of the current ice-cream sandwich vendor at Augusta surfaced the name of a Connecticut-based firm, Royal Ice Cream Company. In response to questions from The Wall Street Journal, the company said it had been "instructed to refer all inquiries regarding the Masters Sandwich" to an Augusta National official. That official did not return a phone call and email.</p> <p>Royal Ice Cream Company was the subject of a Food and Drug Administration recall in February because a plant was potentially contaminated with listeria, a potentially fatal bacteria. The recalled products, according to the FDA, were packaged in pints, gallons, portion control slices—and sandwiches. There is no evidence that the FDA issue has anything to do with the absence of the Georgia Peach Ice Cream Sandwich from this year's tournament.</p> <p>"The company is holding future product and testing before releasing distribution of the products as FDA and the company continue their investigation as to what caused the problem," the FDA said in February.</p> <p>As for the supply-chain issues? A person familiar with the club's thinking said the Georgia Peach Ice Cream Sandwiches would be back next year.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Trying everything to save Florida manatees
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/09/us/trying-everything-even-lettuce-to-save-floridas-beloved-manatees.html
GIST	<p>INDIAN RIVER LAGOON, Fla. — At first, the manatees stayed away from the romaine lettuce.</p> <p>It was an extraordinary experiment in dire times: humans dumping pallets of leafy greens to feed Florida's beloved manatees in the warm waters of the Indian River Lagoon, where decades of pollution have destroyed their delicate sea grass diet.</p> <p>Eventually, a pair of bold manatees approached. With their prehensile lips — they are distantly related to elephants — they grabbed the lettuce and nibbled. More followed. On the coldest days, hundreds came, and over the three-month feeding period, the hungry mammals ate every scrap of the 202,000 pounds of lettuce hurled from above.</p> <p>Floridians cherish manatees, rotund and gentle giants that have long captured the human imagination, but people have failed to care for the animals' environment, putting the species' survival at risk. Now, as manatees are disappearing in large numbers, humans are trying crisis rescue measures in desperate attempts to keep them alive.</p> <p>It may not be enough. The iconic manatee remains in trouble, and with it, a piece of Florida's identity.</p> <p>For more than a century, the state has had a contradictory relationship with nature. The Florida lifestyle is synonymous with outdoor pursuits — but also with sprawling development that damaged the natural plumbing of Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades, threatened the drinking water supply and left the state gravely vulnerable to climate change.</p> <p>Manatees had been something of a success story, their status upgraded to threatened from endangered in 2017 after years of educating boaters to avoid deadly strikes. Starvation has once again put them in peril.</p> <p>Along Florida's Atlantic coast, the die-off began last year, after the Indian River Lagoon, a 156-mile estuary that had been a seasonal manatee refuge, turned into a barren underwater desert. Decades of waste</p>

from leaky septic tanks and fertilizer runoff from farms and development fueled [algal blooms](#) that blocked the sunlight and choked the sea grass that manatees used to eat.

The feeding experiment, conceived and executed by federal and state wildlife officials and fueled by \$116,000 in public donations, was a gamble. Between Jan. 1 and April 1, the number of confirmed deaths fell to 479, down from 612 in 2021. In 2020, that figure was 205.

In all of last year, 1,100 Florida manatees died, a record. About 7,500 are thought to remain in the wild.

This year's dip in deaths does not necessarily mean that starvation has eased and feeding has helped. Scientists will spend the summer reviewing environmental conditions, necropsy results and other data to make a more complete assessment, said Dr. Martine de Wit, a veterinarian with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at its Marine Mammal Pathobiology Lab in St. Petersburg.

"It likely had to do with a later start to winter," she said of the lower preliminary death toll. "And then we had a relatively short winter. So that may have helped some manatees."

Floridians share a special affection for manatees. Threatened with extinction, manatees are "adopted" by people who make charitable donations to support their protection. "Save the Manatee" is one of the state's most popular specialty license plates. Homes display manatee mailboxes.

Small towns like Orange City, home to Blue Spring State Park, hold manatee festivals that draw tourists to places that do not otherwise get many visitors. The most famous is perhaps Crystal River, on Florida's gulf coast, where people can swim with manatees.

But neither fondness nor economic interest has stopped humans from posing a deadly threat — first from boat strikes, which have long caused manatee deaths, and now from pollution, which has destroyed much of their food supply.

Everyone agrees on the ideal long-term solution: restoring the lagoon habitat through a variety of efforts, from growing and planting new sea grass beds to improving storm water drainage to moving properties on septic tanks to sewer systems. But all of those projects are expensive and will take years. To critics, the feeding program was woefully insufficient — too late and far too limited, both in the amount and type of food provided to the animals.

The outlook is not uniformly bleak. Some lucky manatees spent the winter 70 miles northeast of the Indian River Lagoon. The animals had swum to the gem-toned Blue Spring, about halfway between Orlando and Daytona Beach, where they could escape the cold water and be near the abundant foliage of the St. Johns River.

In January, during Orange City's annual manatee festival, food trucks hawked soft-shell crab and alligator sausage. Artisans sold manatee-themed wall clocks and soap dishes. Linda Young of Casselberry wore a manatee beanie to keep warm. "MANATEES ARE AWESOME," her T-shirt declared.

"Everyone in my life, they know me as the manatee girl," said Ms. Young, 45.

The next day at Blue Spring, Wayne Hartley, a jolly 78-year-old manatee specialist with the Save the Manatee Club, set out to count the animals, as he has done since 1980. When he started, 36 manatees wintered at the spring. This year, the season high was 871, a record — and a testament to how some preservation efforts have worked.

Mr. Hartley hopes something else is going on, too: Perhaps manatees that would normally seek refuge in the Indian River Lagoon are trying to adapt to sea grass loss by traveling elsewhere.

"They go back to the East Coast and they're like, 'This place is rotten — I'm going back to Blue Spring,'" he said.

Clutching a small notebook, he paddled his canoe along the crystalline spring waters. Each time he spotted a manatee, he marked its presence in black felt-tip pen. Often, he greeted the sea cows by name.

“Monica!”

“Phyllis.”

“Oh, it’s Precious. Big female. Blue Spring 140,” he said, identifying her by her official number, which he knew from memory.

Some manatees frolicked around his canoe, circling in a sort of dance. He keeps a notebook for each winter recording census counts. He went through a Harry Potter naming phase (“Weasley”) and, as a history major, one for English kings (“Egbert”).

With a moment’s glance as he paddled, he identified manatees by the unique scars on their backs and tails left by boat propeller strikes.

“That’s Alice,” he said. “One of those where you wonder why she’s alive. Those scars down her side? Those are huge and so brutal.”

Park regulars visit on cold, misty days, knowing that is when the most manatees seek the spring’s warmth. Even on a Monday morning, a long line of cars snaked down the street to enter the park.

“Have you seen Annie or Moo Shoo?” a woman asked Mr. Hartley from one of the observation decks inside. (No, but he had seen Lucille.)

“Floyd and Lenny?” a man wanted to know. (Just Whiskers and Nick.)

In the Indian River Lagoon, the turbid brown waters are much less hospitable. The lagoon’s arid bottom, now made up of little more than sand and horseshoe crabs, is a sobering sight.

“I remember when the water was crystal clear, and you could see pastures of sea grass,” said Katrina Shadix, an environmental activist who fished in the lagoon decades ago. “This used to be the most amazing, beautiful estuary. The ecosystem has collapsed.”

Ms. Shadix and Wanda Jones, a marine biologist, rented a pontoon boat frequently during the winter to search the lagoon’s more remote corners for manatees in distress to report to the state’s rescue hotline. Rehabilitation facilities were in such high demand this year that they sent manatees as far away as Ohio to be nursed back to health. Volunteers to staff boat rescues and lift the massive animals using trailers came from as far away as Alaska.

Ms. Shadix and Dr. Jones have urged state wildlife officials to take more dramatic action to save the manatees, including trucking in hydrilla and water hyacinth, invasive aquatic plants that grow in excess along many Florida waterways, and vastly expanding the feeding efforts. (Federal law prohibits unauthorized people from feeding manatees and other wild marine mammals.)

Officials counter that would be too difficult logistically — the limited feeding trial was already a big undertaking — and could introduce unwanted new organisms into the lagoon.

On one of their trips in early March, Dr. Jones steered the boat to a secluded cove on Merritt Island. “This is the manatee graveyard,” Ms. Shadix said.

Manatee carcasses had rotted away there, dumped by officials in 2021 as deaths became overwhelming. The air still smelled putrid. Bones — ribs, vertebrae, some teeth — tufted with green algae remained visible through the shallow water.

	<p>This year, most carcasses went to landfills.</p> <p>For Mr. Hartley in Blue Spring, the hardest days are when state wildlife officials call about a dead manatee and ask him to identify it. This year, that has happened once, in February. He identified the female as Tirma, Blue Spring 775. He had not seen her since 2014.</p> <p>In 2020, he recalled, he drove to a marina where a man with a tractor hauled a carcass. Mr. Hartley recognized it right away. Amber. Daughter of Ann. Pregnant. Cause of death unknown.</p> <p>“Amber was a twin with Amanda, and Amber got abandoned,” he said. “So there was a long history.”</p> <p>He cried after identifying her. His voice caught again when talking about that day.</p> <p>“Maybe it was just too many times,” he said, “going out and seeing them dead like that.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 ‘Emergency’: Australia extreme weather
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/09/this-is-an-emergency-australias-extreme-weather-crises-spark-anger-at-climate-inaction
GIST	<p>With recent months bringing record rain, record heat and a sixth mass bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef, Australia has experienced a troubling start to the year. While unprecedented rainfall resulted in devastating floods along the east coast, other parts of the country have experienced the driest summer in decades.</p> <p>These events have coincided with a La Niña atmospheric phenomenon, which developed in November and is typically associated with a wetter summer across eastern Australia. But the seemingly ceaseless extreme weather this year has left many Australians homeless, despondent and angry at the federal government’s wilful lack of climate action.</p> <p>Between 23 and 28 February, an atmospheric river – like “a tsunami from the sky” – inundated parts of south-east Queensland with more than one metre of torrential rain. At least nine people were killed, and an estimated 15,000 homes in Brisbane, the state’s capital, were flooded. In just six days, almost 80% of the city’s average annual rainfall had fallen.</p> <p>The system then moved south, laying waste to towns in northern New South Wales. The low-lying city of Lismore faced its worst flooding in modern recorded history, inundating houses and gutting the central business district. Distressing footage surfaced of residents who had become stranded on their rooftops by the rapidly rising waters.</p> <p>Once the flood waters had receded, residents of northern NSW returned to their ravaged homes and volunteers pitched in to remove mountains of waste. A national emergency was only declared a week later, ahead of the prime minister, Scott Morrison, visiting Lismore to survey the damage. The town’s locals, with whom he did not meet, were unimpressed.</p> <p>Farther south on the same day – 9 March – flash flooding in parts of Sydney inundated bridges and roads. The city experienced its wettest start to the year on record, and heavy rains turn its famous harbour brown.</p> <p>Just as clean-up efforts were in full swing, a second extreme weather system developed just weeks later, walloping northern NSW for the second time in a month.</p> <p>At the end of March, Lismore went under again; many residents had nothing more left to lose. Heavy rain flooded the main street in the backpacker town of Byron Bay, stunning locals. “I cannot remember sunshine. It has been raining steadily since spring,” wrote Travis Lipshus.</p>

Dr Andrew King, a climate scientist at the University of Melbourne, said it was typically difficult to pinpoint the effect of climate change on extreme rainfall. “Here in Australia we have very high variability from one year to the next, which means it’s hard to pull out a clear climate change signal,” he said.

“But for really short duration extreme rain events”— such as the second bout of damaging rain over northern NSW – “we can see a climate change effect”.

“The warmer the atmosphere gets, the more moisture it can hold,” said Dr Nina Ridder, a research associate at the University of NSW’s Climate Change Research Centre. “Per degree of warming, it’s 7% more water.”

“In observations, we have already seen that extreme rainfall events have become more and more frequent over the past decade ... also, the intensity has increased.”

Meanwhile, farther north, a different kind of mass devastation was unfolding. Corals on the Great Barrier Reef bleached en masse for the sixth time – and the first instance the event has occurred in a La Niña year. It was, a marine scientist [told the Guardian](#), “a clear sign of the increasing intensity of climate change and ocean warming”.

“It’s certainly worrying that we’re seeing bleaching in a La Niña year, but unfortunately I think it’s really a sign of things to come,” King said. “We know that the marine heatwaves we’ve seen in the last few years on the Great Barrier Reef would be virtually impossible to occur without human-caused climate change, at the magnitude we’re seeing.”

“Unless we really keep global warming to very, very low levels, we’re going to lose most of our coral reefs globally,” he said.

Records have also fallen in parts of Australia where La Niña has had less of an effect. Western Australia had a [sweltering summer](#), with temperatures in the state capital of Perth exceeding 40C nine times. In January, the remote town of Onslow registered a [temperature of 50.7C](#), equalling the highest ever reliably recorded in Australia. In the south, the island state of Tasmania had its [driest summer in 40 years](#), where total rainfall was 43% below the long-term average.

“Climate change is increasing the risks of heatwaves, bushfires, and high intensity rainfall,” said Neil Plummer, a consultant at the Monash Climate Change Communication Research Hub.

The risk of these extreme events in future, Plummer said, will “depend upon the extent countries, including Australia, reduce their carbon emissions and deforestation practices”.

Despite the urgent call to scale up climate action, the Morrison government plans to [reduce annual climate spending](#) if returned to power after the next federal election, which is due in May. It has also pushed to [soften the wording](#) of an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report to say that the Great Barrier Reef is not yet in crisis.

The Coalition government’s actions are particularly jarring in light of the extremes – bushfires, drought and mice plagues – that many Australians have experienced in recent years, to which 2022’s devastation is but the most recent addition. Many now feel, as the incoming NSW Greens politician [Sue Higgins puts it](#): “This is an emergency – a climate emergency.”

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HEADLINE	04/08 FAA: biggest fines yet unruly passengers
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/faa-seeks-biggest-fines-yet-against-2-unruly-passengers
GIST	WASHINGTON - The Federal Aviation Administration said Friday that it is seeking the largest fines yet for passengers who disrupt flights after two incidents that occurred on airliners last summer.

	<p>The FAA said it proposed a civil penalty of \$81,950 against a passenger who struck a flight attendant on the head, tried to open a cabin door and headbutted, spit at and tried to kick crew members and passengers even after she was placed in flexible handcuffs.</p> <p>The incident happened on an American Airlines flight last July. The FAA said the passenger was arrested when the plane landed in Charlotte, North Carolina.</p> <p>The FAA is seeking a \$77,272 fine against a woman who tried to open a cabin door during a flight and bit another passenger repeatedly before she was restrained by the crew on a Delta Air Lines flight from Las Vegas to Atlanta last July.</p> <p>Neither person was identified. They have 30 days to respond to the accusations.</p> <p>The FAA said the fines are part of roughly \$2 million in proposed penalties it has announced since Jan. 1. Airlines have reported a high number of incidents since early 2021 — more than 1,000 this year alone — with most of them involving passengers who refuse to wear face masks.</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	04/10 DOJ: fake agents were tipped off
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/arian-taherzadeh-haider-ali-were-tipped-off-to-arrest-for-posing-as-homeland-security-agents-doj-says?ref=home
GIST	<p>A pair of phony Homeland Security agents who allegedly infiltrated the highest levels of federal law enforcement and plied agents with lavish gifts were somehow tipped off to their arrest last week, allowing them to stash guns and other items, prosecutors revealed in a new filing on Sunday.</p> <p>Arian Taherzadeh, 40, and Haider Ali, 36, were arrested last week when cops swarmed the upscale Crossing Apartments in Washington, D.C.'s Navy Yard neighborhood, bringing what appears to be an extraordinary two-year-long ruse to an end.</p> <p>The pair were charged with false impersonation of a federal officer for allegedly running an elaborate scheme that fooled at least one Homeland Security official and four Secret Service agents working on security details for President Joe Biden, first lady Jill Biden, and Vice President Kamala Harris. The duo allegedly flashed official-looking IDs, carried Glocks, drove black SUVs with flashing lights, and became so friendly with some agents that they put the agents up for free in penthouses at the Crossings and gifted them iPhones, rifles, and drones.</p> <p>Federal prosecutor Matthew Graves said in the Sunday filing that investigators are still uncovering disturbing new information following last week's arrests.</p> <p>"Each hour since their arrest, the Government learns more—and scarier—information about how Taherzadeh and Ali abused their fake authority," he said as he argued both men should be detained before trial.</p> <p>For example, Graves said, investigators sifting through the multiple apartments Taherzadeh and Ali occupied at the Crossings have found illegal high-capacity magazines for Taherzadeh's Sig Sauer 229 and Ali's Glock 19. That's in addition to the long list of items already seized including guns, ammo, body armor, surveillance gear, forced entry tools like a sledgehammer and mini-door ram, fake training certificates, fake badges, gas masks, tactical gear, hard drivers, servers, a drone, training manuals from the Department of Homeland Security and Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and a binder with a list of every resident at the Crossings, a building popular with law enforcement families.</p>

Graves said more victims have come forward since last week too, including a Naval Intelligence Officer to whom Taherzadeh allegedly claimed to be a Homeland Security Investigations agent. “The Intelligence Officer was so alarmed and concerned about Taherzadeh’s attempt to gather information that he reported the contact to the Naval Criminal Investigative Services,” the filing says.

More troubling, the pair appear to have been tipped off to the FBI’s impending raid and arrest, and tried to ditch some potentially incriminating items via a Secret Service agent assigned to protect the White House, prosecutors said.

Officers found shipping materials and UPS labels in one of their penthouses, and in early April, as the FBI surveilled the pair, the Secret Service agent received a package in the mail from the pair, prosecutors said. The package contained three empty cases for Sig Sauer and Glock firearms that have not been found, a high-capacity magazine, and four expensive cigars.

“This is consistent with the prior pattern and practice of providing federal law enforcement agents with gifts and items of value, and suggests that Taherzadeh and/or Ali shipped the package to the USSS Uniformed Division Officer in an attempt to corruptly enlist him in secreting evidence,” the filing said.

Prosecutors said in a Thursday arraignment hearing that [Ali had boasted of his ties to Pakistani intelligence services](#) to at least two witnesses, and had visas in his passport for Iran and Pakistan, but the FBI has not confirmed any ties to overseas spy agencies.

Such high-level ties would come as a surprise to two former friends and business associates of Taherzadeh, [who described him to The Daily Beast on Friday](#) as nothing more than a failed entrepreneur and serial grifter who left a trail of bounced checks and empty promises in Missouri a decade ago.

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HEADLINE	03/09 Georgia: 3 dead gun range shooting
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/police-three-dead-in-shooting-at-georgia-gun-range/
GIST	<p>ATLANTA (AP) — Police are searching for at least one armed suspect in connection with the killing of the owner of a gun range in Georgia and his wife and grandson, authorities said Saturday.</p> <p>The Grantville Police Department said via Facebook that the robbery occurred Friday evening. When officers arrived at the scene around 8 p.m., they discovered the bodies of the owner of Lock Stock & Barrel Shooting Range, along with his wife and grandson.</p> <p>According to WSB-TV, Grantville Police identified the victims as the gun range owner, Thomas Hawk, 75; his wife, Evelyn, 75; and their grandson, Luke, 17.</p> <p>Police Chief Steve Whitlock said the Hawk family was well-known and well-respected in their small, tight-knit community. The Hawks had operated Lock Stock & Barrel for nearly 30 years. Their grandson was on spring break, helping his grandparents at the shop.</p> <p>“This is just a shock to everybody in the community,” Whitlock told The Associated Press. “We’re trying to do the best that we can to figure this out.”</p> <p>Whitlock said investigators believe the robbery and shooting happened around 5:30 p.m. Friday, which is when the range normally closes. He said Hawk’s son, Richard, came by the business and was the person who found the victims.</p> <p>There are no suspects as of early Saturday, and no arrests have been made, he said. Investigators said that as many as 40 guns and the range’s surveillance camera were also stolen.</p> <p>The Georgia Bureau of Investigation is investigating, but when contacted Saturday referred all inquiries to Grantville Police. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives was also called in due to the</p>

amount of weapons taken. Whitlock said he's grateful for the help from other law enforcement agencies in the investigation.

"We're just a small town, 12 officers. I've been here eight years and have never had to investigate anything like this. It's been kind of hard on us. The crime rate is really, really low," he said.

A reward of \$15,000 has been posted for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the killer or killers in the case, according to the ATF Atlanta office's Twitter feed.

"ATF and our law enforcement partners will work tirelessly to bring the killer(s) to justice," ATF Atlanta Field Division Special Agent in Charge Benjamin P. Gibbons said in a statement. "The brutality of these senseless murders along with the fact that these killer(s) have acquired additional firearms makes solving this case our top priority."

A message left with the ATF office in Atlanta was not immediately returned.

Police are asking any witnesses to come forward. Whitlock said they don't have any video evidence to work with right now.

"Anyone having driven by the shooting range during the time frame of 530pm to 630 pm that may have seen vehicles other than a white Ford dually truck and a black Ford expedition are asked to contact the police department," Grantville police said in their Facebook statement.

The shooting range is in rural Coweta County, about 50 miles (about 80 kilometers) southwest of Atlanta.

Coweta County Sheriff Lenn Wood said in a statement on Facebook that the entire community was forever broken by the "senseless and tragic" killings of the Hawk family members.

"I am also fervently praying that God will use our law enforcement community and the Coweta Community," he said, "to bring justice swiftly."

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HEADLINE	04/10 Jan 6 panel criminal referral evidence
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/10/us/politics/jan-6-trump-criminal-referral.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The leaders of the House committee investigating the Capitol attack have grown divided over whether to make a criminal referral to the Justice Department of former President Donald Trump, even though they have concluded that they have enough evidence to do so, people involved in the discussions said.</p> <p>The debate centers on whether making a referral — a largely symbolic act — would backfire by politically tainting the Justice Department's expanding investigation into the Jan. 6 assault and what led up to it.</p> <p>Since the summer, a team of former federal prosecutors working for the committee has focused on documenting the attack and the preceding efforts by Trump and his allies to reverse his defeat in the 2020 election. The panel plans to issue a detailed report on its findings, but in recent months it has regularly signaled that it was also weighing a criminal referral that would pressure Attorney General Merrick Garland to open a criminal investigation into Trump.</p> <p>But now, with the Justice Department appearing to ramp up a wide-ranging investigation, some Democrats are questioning whether there is any need to make a referral — and whether doing so would saddle a criminal case with further partisan baggage at a time when Trump is openly flirting with running again in 2024.</p> <p>The shift in the committee's perspective on making a referral was prompted in part by a ruling two weeks ago by Judge David O. Carter of the U.S. District Court for Central California. Deciding a civil case in</p>

which the committee had sought access to more than 100 emails written by John C. Eastman, a lawyer who advised Trump on efforts to derail certification of the Electoral College outcome, Carter found that it was “more likely than not” that Trump and Eastman had committed federal crimes.

The ruling led some committee and staff members to argue that even though they felt they had amassed enough evidence to justify calling for a prosecution for obstructing a congressional proceeding and conspiring to defraud the American people, the judge’s decision would carry far greater weight with Garland than any referral letter they could write, according to people with knowledge of the conversations.

The members and aides who were reluctant to support a referral contended that making one would create the appearance that Garland was investigating Trump at the behest of a Democratic Congress and that if the committee could avoid that perception it should, the people said.

Even if the final report does not include a specific referral letter to Garland, the findings would still provide federal prosecutors with the evidence the committee uncovered — including some that has not yet become public — that could be used as a road map for any prosecution, the people said.

“If you read his decision, I think it’s quite telling,” Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., a member of the committee, said of Carter’s ruling. “He and we have reviewed a huge amount of documents, and he reached a conclusion that he outlined in very stark terms.” Lofgren is among those who believe a referral letter to the Justice Department is superfluous, since it would carry no legal weight.

“Maybe we will, maybe we won’t,” she said of a referral. “It doesn’t have a legal impact.”

But the question about whether to send the referral has, for one of the first times since the committee was formed in July, exposed differences among members about the panel’s mission.

Rep. Elaine Luria, D-Va., a member of the panel, said that the committee should still send a referral for any crimes it uncovers.

“I would say that I don’t agree with what some of my colleagues have said about this,” Luria said on MSNBC this month. “I think it’s a lot more important to do what’s right than it is to worry about the political ramifications. This committee, our purpose is legislative and oversight, but if in the course of our investigation we find that criminal activity has occurred, I think it’s our responsibility to refer that to the Department of Justice.”

Although staff members have been in discussions about a referral, and some have debated the matter publicly, the committee members have not sat down together to discuss whether to proceed with a referral, several lawmakers said.

Rep. Pete Aguilar, D-Calif., said the committee was likely to hold off on making a final determination until investigators finished their work. He said the panel was “finishing up” its investigative phase and shifting to a more “public-facing” one in which the panel will present its findings.

“The members haven’t had those conversations,” Aguilar said of a meeting to discuss a potential referral. “Right now, we’re gathering the material that we need. As the investigative phase winds down, we’ll have more conversations about what the report looks like. But we’re not presupposing where that’s going to go before we get a little further with the interviews.”

Although the committee has the ability to subpoena testimony and documents and make referrals to the Justice Department for prosecutions, it has no criminal prosecution powers.

The committee’s vice chairwoman, Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., singled out Trump’s conduct at a public hearing in December, reading from the criminal code and laying out how she believed he had obstructed Congress. In early March, the committee in effect road-tested whether the evidence it had gathered could

support a prosecution, laying out in a filing in the civil case before Carter its position that Trump and Eastman had obstructed Congress and defrauded the American public.

In validating the committee's position, legal experts said, the judge made it difficult for the Justice Department to avoid an investigation. Garland has given no public indication of the department's intentions other than to say that it will follow the facts and the law. But subpoenas issued by a federal grand jury indicate that prosecutors are gathering information about a wide array of issues, including about efforts to obstruct the election certification by people in the Trump White House and in Congress.

Investigators from the House committee and the Justice Department have not been sharing information, except to avoid conflicts around the scheduling of certain witnesses.

"We want them to move faster, but we respect their work," Aguilar said, adding that the committee has a different goal than the Justice Department's inquiry: to fully investigate what led to the riot, which injured more than 150 police officers, and take legislative steps to prevent a repeat. "It's an insult to the lives of the Capitol Police officers if we don't pursue what happened and take meaningful and concrete steps to ensure that it doesn't happen again."

Aside from the question of whether to make a referral about Trump, the committee has moved aggressively to use the Justice Department to ensure that witnesses cooperate with its investigation. The committee has made criminal referrals against four Trump White House officials for their refusal to sit for questioning or hand over documents, accusing them of contempt of Congress. But the Justice Department has charged only one — Steve Bannon — frustrating the committee.

Those frustrations played out in public at a hearing this month, when Lofgren said: "This committee is doing its job. The Department of Justice needs to do theirs."

Lofgren said she had not planned to make the remarks, but as she sat on the dais during the hearing, she decided to veer from her planned remarks because the department's slowness in addressing the contempt referrals ate at her.

"Some of us did express some frustration. I'm among them," she said. "Honestly, I hadn't planned to say that. It wasn't my script. It wasn't there. But I thought, you know, this is frustrating. I just decided to say it."

Trying to pressure the Justice Department to prosecute a contempt of Congress charge is more appropriate than other criminal referrals, Lofgren argued.

"It's different than doing a referral generally for prosecution," she said. "When you're the victim of a crime, there is some weight to that. And when you are the victim of criminal contempt, as the committee is, you're the victim. And so I think there was some stature to that."

The committee is preparing to hold public hearings in May and June, and to make a final report in September.

After interviewing more than 800 witnesses — including more than a dozen Trump White House officials — the panel has another 100 interviews lined up, including some witnesses it wants to bring in a second time. Among those scheduled to testify soon is Stephen Miller, a former White House adviser to Trump, who the committee says helped spread false claims of voter fraud in the election and encouraged state legislatures to appoint alternate slates of electors in an effort to invalidate Joe Biden's victory.

Miller has sued to block the committee from gaining access to his phone records, arguing in part that the panel was invading his parents' privacy since he was on their family plan.

	<p>The committee is still deciding whether to call some key witnesses, including Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and Virginia Thomas, wife of Justice Clarence Thomas, who urged Mark Meadows, the White House chief of staff at the time, to work to keep Trump in office.</p> <p>“We have completed a substantial amount of work,” Lofgren said. “We’re going to accomplish — we hope — what we set out to do, which is to tell the entire story of what happened, the events of the 6th and the events that led up to the day.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Iceland chilled by violence
SOURCE	https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220410-iceland-chilled-by-violence-worthy-of-its-noir-novels
GIST	<p>Reykjavik (AFP) – Long considered the "most peaceful country in the world", Iceland's tranquillity has been shattered by a spate of shootings and stabbings involving criminal gangs.</p> <p>The country of only 375,000 people is more accustomed to reading about murders in its famed Icelandic noir novels than in its morning newspapers.</p> <p>"A gun for Icelanders symbolises sports" or hunting, said sociologist Helgi Gunnlaugsson.</p> <p>"It's very alien to the Icelandic mind that you would use a weapon to protect yourself or to point at people," he told AFP.</p> <p>Iceland has topped the Global Peace Index ranking since 2008 thanks to its low crime, strong education and welfare systems, fair pay and an absence of tension between social classes.</p> <p>Only four people have been shot dead in more than two decades.</p> <p>But four shootings have now taken place in a little over a year, one of which was fatal.</p> <p>In February 2021, a man was gunned down in a hail of bullets outside his home in a neighbourhood of the capital Reykjavik, a murder that shocked the nation.</p> <p>The killing was linked to organised crime, police said.</p> <p>"Criminal groups in Iceland are becoming more organised," said criminologist Margret Valdimarsdottir.</p> <p>"They have more ties to international groups than what we've seen before, which may be a challenge for our police force."</p> <p>In February, two separate drug-related shootings took place in Reykjavik two days apart, one in the city centre.</p> <p>The gang violence is similar to that already seen in other parts of Europe.</p> <p>"It takes five to 10 years for what is trending in Europe to show up in Iceland," said Runolfur Thorhallsson, superintendent of Iceland's elite police unit, known as the Viking Squad.</p> <p>"Of course this is a concern for us."</p> <p>- Unarmed police -</p> <p>Iceland is one of the rare countries in the world where police are not armed in their daily duties.</p> <p>However, patrol cars have been equipped with handguns in special safes since late 2015 after the bloody attacks by far-right extremist Anders Behring Breivik in Norway in 2011.</p>

Only a small number of police officers -- the Viking Squad -- are permanently armed with semi-automatic weapons as well as bulletproof vests and ballistic shields.

The squad assists the police when weapons are reported, with the number of such incidents rocketing almost six-fold since 2014.

"We see indicators that maybe people are less hesitant in this criminal world to use weapons. We see more of an increase in knives than firearms," Thorhallsson said.

While he doesn't have an explanation for the rise in violence, the interior minister is considering equipping police with tasers.

The head of the police union, Fjólnir Saemundsson, welcomed the idea but called for more recruits and training.

With 682 police officers in 2021, Iceland has one of Europe's smallest police forces relative to its population, second only to Finland and almost half the European average, according to EU statistics agency Eurostat.

A safe country

Studlar, a government-run treatment centre for juveniles aged from 12 to 18, helps troubled youths with problems ranging from drugs to crime and behavioural issues.

Director Funi Sigurdsson said he has also seen a slight rise in violent incidents, with the centre confiscating an increasing number of knives.

He said with some of the young people it was often clear "when they were six years old that they would end up here.

"If we would have intervened very well then, we could possibly have prevented them from ending up in this situation."

Several of those involved in the score-settling between the gangs passed through the centre as juveniles.

While the rise in violent crime has caused concern, the situation is not alarming, experts insisted.

"It's important to note that Iceland is still a country that has an extremely low crime rate," Valdimarsdottir said.

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HEADLINE	04/10 Iowa nightclub shooting: 2 dead, 10 injured
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/10/us/cedar-rapids-nightclub-shooting/index.html
GIST	<p>CNN — Two people were killed and about 10 others injured in a shooting at a Cedar Rapids, Iowa, nightclub early Sunday morning, police said.</p> <p>The shooting happened just before 1:30 a.m. at the Taboo Nightclub and Lounge, the Cedar Rapids Police Department said in a statement. The club was hosting a 90s-themed party, according to a post on social media.</p> <p>Cedar Rapids officers were on routine patrol downtown at the time of the shooting, the statement said, and were able to respond immediately.</p> <p>Police have secured the scene and “there is no threat to public safety,” the statement said.</p>

	Police did not release any information about possible suspects or arrests. The investigation remained ongoing Sunday morning and anyone “present at the time of the shooting or with knowledge of the incident” is asked to contact investigators, the statement said.
	The injured are receiving medical care at multiple local hospitals.
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HEADLINE	04/08 Feds bust massive marriage fraud ring
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/8/feds-bust-massive-marriage-fraud-ring-arranged-mor/
GIST	<p>Federal prosecutors say they have busted a massive immigrant marriage fraud ring that made more than \$8 million over the past five years by arranging bogus unions and filing at least 400 fake applications with Homeland Security.</p> <p>When the sham marriages didn’t work out because the U.S. citizens got cold feet, the fraudsters would fabricate fake domestic violence cases against them and then apply for green cards, signaling permanent legal status, under a law meant to protect battered spouses, according to court documents.</p> <p>Eleven people were indicted in the fraud, which prosecutors said provided full service to “clients” by recruiting “spouses” — often homeless people — and coaching both people on how to appear to be a couple, arranging fake wedding ceremonies and submitting bogus packages to Homeland Security.</p> <p>“It is the utmost honor and privilege to become an American citizen, and the individuals we arrested today have allegedly made a sham of that process,” said Joseph R. Bonavolonta, special agent in charge of the FBI’s Boston office.</p> <p>The ring was based in southern California and the man whom the feds say was the ringleader, Marcialito Biol Benitez, is known as “Mars.” He worked with “brokers” who scoured for American citizens willing to be paid to be paired in sham marriages.</p> <p>In one 15-month period, the feds say four brokers managed to recruit at least 193 people for sham marriages, including Devon Hammer, who is accused of netting 94 just by himself.</p> <p>Clients would pay between \$20,000 and \$30,000 for the full-service sham marriage packages. The brokers would get about \$2,000 per U.S. citizen recruit, the citizens got a cut, and the rest went to Mr. Benitez and his assistants, four of whom are included in the indictment.</p> <p>Experts say marriage fraud is rampant, and there have been some stunning cases.</p> <p>Investigators last year revealed a fraud ring they say was run by a former Iraqi refugee who specialized in bringing other Iraqis to the U.S., and earlier this year a foreign service officer at the State Department was sentenced for having engaged in a fraudulent marriage.</p> <p>Marriage can be used as a way to cure illegal immigrant status or to win permanent status for those who entered on visitor visas and want to gain more permanent status here. They also offer quick access to benefits such as work permits and tax breaks.</p> <p>That makes fake marriages an attractive option, and sometimes those involved are quite blatant. Online message boards on marriage-minded sites even run ads from both Americans looking to offer themselves as willing spouses and migrants looking for citizens.</p> <p>Yet U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the agency that referees immigration marriage applications, is moving to erase some controls.</p>

The same day the charges were announced this week against the \$8 million fraud ring, USCIS announced it was canceling a policy that had required mandatory in-person interviews for married couples when a spouse was seeking to upgrade a conditional green card.

Those are issued in cases where a marriage was less than two years old.

Ur Jaddou, director of USCIS, said waiving the interview was intended to cut down on massive case backlogs, and said there's no reason to require an interview in cases where there's "sufficient evidence" in the record that a marriage is bona fide.

"This update is consistent with agency priorities to break down barriers in the immigration system, eliminate undue burdens on those seeking benefits, and effectively respond to stakeholder feedback and public concerns," Ms. Jaddou said.

The court documents don't say whether the marriages involved in the fraud ring were for conditional green cards, though given the timeframes of the marriages and applications, it's likely that some of them would have been.

USCIS said it doesn't have estimates of what percentage of cases still will be subject to interviews, but said the old policy of mandatory interviews was not an "efficient" use of the agency's time.

Robert Law, a former senior USCIS official in the Trump administration, questioned the move.

"The USCIS political team continues to double down on making immigration fraud easier to commit," said Mr. Law, who's now at the Center for Immigration Studies. "As DOJ aggressively prosecutes marriage fraud, Ur Jaddou and her team continue to cover their eyes and order adjudicators to rubber-stamp approvals."

Court documents revealed the efforts that the "agency," as the fraudsters called their operation, made to fool Ms. Jaddou's immigration officers.

They held sham ceremonies at chapels that didn't demand proof of valid marriages in order to shoot photos of the couple on their wedding day, and built invented or inflated backstories for the U.S. citizens, giving them better jobs and more income to convince USCIS they could support their immigrant spouses — a requirement under the law, authorities said.

The fraudsters would also coach the fake couples on things that USCIS adjudicators might ask at their initial interviews, with a list of 211 "possible questions" the couples were supposed to go over to get their stories straight.

That included everything from who slept on which side of the bed, to what color their spouse's toothbrush was.

The fraudsters would also scour social media of the U.S. citizens and ordered them to take down any posts that might raise flags, prosecutors alleged. In one instance the ring even told someone to change her cell phone background photo because it showed a picture of her child, which could raise questions if a USCIS adjudicator were to see it.

Clients could come from across the country, but they had to prove residence in California, since that's where the U.S. citizens were living. So the fraud ring would rent out their own addresses and mailboxes to clients to use on USCIS forms.

According to court documents, the ringleader was worried that people would find out he was recruiting homeless people to act as spouses, so he worked to try to enhance their backstories to make them more attractive, both to clients and to immigration officers.

	<p>Sometimes the American citizen acting as a “spouse” would back out of the sham marriage, and that’s when the scam became truly mendacious, prosecutors said.</p> <p>The fraud ring would fabricate a story of spousal abuse, file for a temporary restraining order in court citing the bogus abuse story, then file that document with USCIS to try to earn a green card under the Violence Against Women Act.</p> <p>VAWA fraud, like marriage fraud, is believed to be rampant. And since the number of green cards that can be issued under VAWA is capped at 10,000 a year, bogus claims can end up crowding out legitimate cases of abuse, said Rachael S. Rollins, U.S. attorney in Massachusetts, where the case was unsealed Thursday.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Tacoma police investigate deadly shooting
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/police-investigating-after-man-shot-killed-tacoma/R3PB3SRLMFC5NN4WAMQ4V4EBUE/
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — Tacoma police are investigating after a man was shot and killed Friday night.</p> <p>Officers responded to reports of a possible shooting in the 8800 block of Pacific Avenue at around 9 p.m.</p> <p>When police got to the scene, they say they found a man who had been shot.</p> <p>Officers started life-saving measures while waiting for the Tacoma Fire Department to arrive.</p> <p>The man was then transported to a hospital where he later died.</p> <p>Detectives and crime scene technicians responded to the scene and say they are investigating this incident as a homicide.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Spokane drive-by shooting; 2 dead, 1 hurt
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/2-dead-1-wounded-in-drive-by-shooting-in-downtown-spokane
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — Two people have died and a third person is hospitalized in stable condition after a drive-by shooting in downtown Spokane, Washington.</p> <p>The Spokane Police Department said the shooting occurred 1:30 a.m. Saturday morning near Lucky's Pub. Arriving officers found three shooting victims, all with life-threatening injuries.</p> <p>Two of the victims, a man and woman, were standing outside the bar on the sidewalk when they were shot. The third was a cab driver who was parked near the bar.</p> <p>It's not immediately clear which shooting victim survived.</p> <p>Police say multiple shots were fired when the driver drove near Lucky's Pub.</p> <p>Shortly after, a Washington State Patrol trooper located the car and detained the driver without incident.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Shootings increase along WA freeways
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/shootings-increase-along-washington-freeways
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — The Washington State Patrol is warning drivers of an uptick in freeway shootings, attributing the trend to a general increase in gun violence.</p>

	<p>In King County, 20 shootings on interstates or state routes have occurred so far this year, according to Washington State Patrol Sgt. Darren Wright. That compares with 12 shootings during a similar period last year.</p> <p>Trooper Robert Reyer says freeway shootings in Pierce County have more than doubled so far this year, with 23 shootings compared with 10 in the same period the year before.</p> <p>While some incidents are the results of escalated road rage, he said some incidents also appear to be gang-related.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Pierce Co. stolen cars up 150%
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/stolen-cars-up-150-this-year-in-pierce-county
GIST	<p>PIERCE COUNTY, Wash. - The Puget Sound Auto Task Force released alarming numbers this week showing how big the problem of stolen cars is for Pierce County.</p> <p>Data shows on average, there were 30 cars stolen a day in the county during the month of March.</p> <p>Sergeant Darren Moss, with the Pierce County Sheriff's Department, says stolen car numbers are up 150% this year, in comparison to the same time period in 2021.</p> <p>A big reason for the increase in stolen cars is due to the fact that police cannot chase vehicle-theft suspects, Moss said.</p> <p>However, there may be hope on the horizon.</p> <p>For the last few months, jail restrictions prevented holding some criminals behind bars due to COVID.</p> <p>Now, jail restrictions are being lifted that which may prevent repeat car theft offenders.</p> <p><i>"Recently, we've started booking people for theft of motor vehicle, and the prosecutor's office is doing their best to charge all the cases that they can, but we're hoping that this will catchup and we'll start deterring people from stealing cars and hopefully they will be sitting in jail," said Moss.</i></p> <p>Vehicle thefts are affecting other parts of Western Washington as well.</p> <p>The Puget Sound Auto Task Force says King County saw an average of 45 cars a day in the month of March.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Funding mystery in Secret Service case
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/funding-remains-mystery-in-secret-service-impersonation-case-11649460019?mod=hp_listb_pos1
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—Federal prosecutors are investigating the money trail behind two men accused of posing as federal agents to ingratiate themselves with Secret Service officers, the government told a judge Friday.</p> <p>Arian Taherzadeh and Haider Ali are charged with impersonating federal officers and allegedly gave Secret Service personnel lavish gifts, including rent-free apartments and a drone. In one instance, Mr. Taherzadeh offered to provide a \$2,000 rifle to a Secret Service officer who worked on the first lady's security detail, according to court documents.</p> <p>Messrs. Taherzadeh and Ali were arrested Wednesday and appeared via video at a detention hearing Friday before Magistrate Judge G. Michael Harvey, who pressed prosecutors about unanswered questions</p>

regarding the men's activities. While the men remain detained for now, Judge Harvey said he wanted more information from prosecutors and scheduled another hearing for Monday to consider the government's request to keep them detained as their case proceeds.

Prosecutors argued that Messrs. Taherzadeh and Ali pose a danger to the community based on their use of firearms as part of a scheme to pose as Department of Homeland Security officers.

"The Defendants were not merely playing dress-up; they had firearms, they had ammunition, they had body armor, they had tactical gear, they had surveillance equipment, and they were engaged in conduct that represented a serious threat to the community, compromised the operations of a federal law enforcement agency, and created a potential risk to national security," prosecutors wrote in their filing Friday.

The defendants' court-appointed lawyers didn't get a chance to address the prosecution's request before the hearing was adjourned.

Grand jury subpoenas have been issued to investigate the men's finances, Assistant U.S. Attorney Joshua Rothstein told the judge Friday. Prosecutors haven't provided any specific explanation for the pair's motives in court documents but allege that they were trying to get close to law-enforcement officials.

Judge Harvey asked about a company, United Special Police LLC, that prosecutors said was registered to an address used by Mr. Taherzadeh and whose website described it as a private security company, according to court documents. The judge asked if the company was legitimate and whether it served as an explanation for the men possessing firearms and other gear.

Mr. Taherzadeh wasn't permitted to possess a firearm due to a previous domestic-violence conviction, prosecutors said in a court filing Friday.

Mr. Taherzadeh told law enforcement after his arrest that Mr. Ali funded most of their activities but said he didn't know the source of Mr. Ali's money, prosecutors said in the filing.

Mr. Rothstein told Judge Harvey that prosecutors were still investigating whether the men ever asked for anything from two Secret Service agents they provided with rent-free apartments.

Prosecutors said Mr. Ali was a flight risk, saying he had traveled to locations in the Middle East including Iran and Doha, Qatar, in recent years. Mr. Ali claimed to have a connection to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency, according to one witness, prosecutors said.

Mr. Taherzadeh began deleting his social-media posts related to law enforcement shortly after he was interviewed in March by a U.S. postal inspector, prosecutors said in the filing Friday.

The postal inspector learned about the two men while investigating an alleged assault involving a letter carrier in southeastern Washington, according to court documents. The inspector then alerted other law-enforcement officials.

Authorities searched five apartments at the high-end apartment complex where the men lived, as well as three vehicles, and found a trove of policing and spy tools—including firearms, a drone, a machine for creating phony ID cards, vests, gas masks and police lights—according to the court filing. Authorities needed a moving truck for all the items seized, the prosecutor told the judge Friday.

Authorities also seized documents containing detailed information about other tenants in the complex, including apartment numbers and contact information, prosecutors said, adding that many of the residents work for law-enforcement or other federal agencies.

Four Secret Service members were placed on administrative leave as of earlier this week pending further investigation related to the case, federal prosecutors said. The Secret Service said Thursday that all

	personnel involved in the case are on administrative leave and restricted from accessing Secret Service facilities and equipment. The agency declined to comment further on Friday.
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HEADLINE	04/08 L.A. jail guards routinely beat inmates
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/08/los-angeles-jail-sheriffs-department-violence-accusation
GIST	<p>Los Angeles jail guards have frequently punched incarcerated people in the head and subjected them to a “humiliating” group strip-search where they were forced to wait undressed for hours, according to a new report from court-appointed monitors documenting a range of abuses.</p> <p>The Los Angeles sheriff’s department (LASD), which oversees the largest local jail system in the country, appears to be routinely violating use-of-force policies, with supervisors failing to hold guards accountable and declining to provide information to the monitors tasked with reviewing the treatment of incarcerated people.</p> <p>The report, filed in federal court on Thursday, adds to a long string of scandals for the department. The monitors – first put in place in 2014 to settle a case involving beatings – suggested that some problems in the jails appeared to be getting worse after they visited the facilities in December 2021.</p> <p>The monitors, Robert Houston, a former corrections official, and Jeffrey Schwartz, a consultant, alleged that the use of “head shots”, meaning punches to the head, had been “relatively unchanged in the last two years or more, and may be increasing”. They also wrote that deputies who used force in violation of policy were at times sent to “remedial training” but that “actual discipline is seldom imposed”. And supervisors who failed to document violations were also “not held accountable”.</p> <p>The authors cited one incident in which a deputy approached a resident who had “walked away from him” while he was being escorted. “With no hesitation, Deputy Y grabbed [his] chest and slammed him into the wall. Deputy Y punched [him] 5-9 times in the head, and Deputy Z punched [him] 6-8 times in the head as they took [him] to the floor because they ‘feared’ that the Inmate might become assaultive”.</p> <p>The report also documented an incident on 7 September 2021, when there were reports that a firearm “might have been smuggled” into Men’s Central jail. Guards responded by instituting a “shakedown” and strip-search of residents.</p> <p>“They said they were taken out of their cells in the morning, given no explanation (except for one inmate who said he was told the reason for the search by a deputy), strip-searched, then walked naked en masse through the jail and down to the room with the X-ray machine,” the report said, citing complaints from jail residents. “Passing large numbers of male and female staff members, some of whom ... mocked them or made other humiliating comments”.</p> <p>Those interviewed said they eventually got underwear, but still no shoes, and were taken to a yard where they were forced to wait for hours until they returned to their cells later that night.</p> <p>LASD did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the report on Friday.</p> <p>The monitors said they had written officials in January to ask if this was standard procedure, and whether the residents were given food, water and access to bathrooms while waiting. According to the monitors, the department responded that it had completed a “report” about the incident with “corrective action plans”, but in the three months since, it had not sent documents or further information.</p> <p>The report raised further concerns about the department’s use of the “Wrap” device, which functions like a full-body restraining jacket and is used to “immobilize” people. The Wrap procedures pose a serious risk of asphyxiation, and “the continuing practice ... cannot be justified”, the monitors said.</p>

The department had failed to fulfill its requirement to write a Wrap policy that the monitors had approved, and it had further misled the monitors about how the jail was using the device, the report alleged: “The practices used with Wrap appear to be almost diametrically opposed to the way in which the Department explained that Wrap was being used.”

In 2018, a man in jail in northern California [died of asphyxiation](#) after being subjected to the Wrap device, sparking widespread scrutiny of the practice.

The LA jails have for years been plagued by [corruption](#) and [obstruction of justice](#) scandals, with the former sheriff Lee Baca and his second in command both [convicted](#) in cases stemming from misconduct investigations. [Guards in the Men’s Central jail](#) have also long been accused of being part of a “deputy gang”, known for allegedly using [excessive force](#). The department has also faced mounting questions this year about the [death of a 27-year-old in solitary confinement](#).

“These are not one-time incidents – this is the culture and history of the department,” said Mark-Anthony Clayton-Johnson, executive director of Dignity and Power Now, a group that has long been fighting to [shut down](#) the Men’s Central jail. He said the report reminded him of the misconduct allegations and obfuscation from department leaders in a [2012 case](#). “After 10 years of exposure, 10 years of scandal, 10 years of reform, this department has had a lot of opportunities to get this right ... but has continued to revert back to some of the most vicious attacks on Black and brown people.

“It is clear our loved ones are not safe in the custody of the sheriff’s department,” he added.

Peter Eliasberg, chief counsel at the ACLU Foundation of Southern [California](#), said it was especially disturbing that the problems seemed to be escalating under sheriff Alex Villanueva, who was elected in 2018: “They are treating incarcerated people in the jails in a sub-human manner ... There’s just an utter lack of accountability, which ultimately goes to the top.”

Helen Jones, an [organizer](#) whose 22-year-old son [died in LA sheriff’s custody in 2009](#), said she wasn’t surprised by the report: “It’s been this way for so long, it’s just the norm. It’s out of control, and there are no consequences.”

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HEADLINE	04/08 Renton police: copper wire thefts arrests
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/renton-police-arrest-multiple-people-in-copper-wire-thefts
GIST	<p>RENTON, Wash. - Police arrested multiple people in connection with copper wire thefts throughout Renton.</p> <p>The FBI calls thieves who steal copper wiring a threat to U.S. critical infrastructure. They exploit demands overseas and target everything from railroads to homes. Now the crooks are coming out in force, hitting at least five sites in five days in Renton.</p> <p>On Saturday before 10 a.m., officers responded to a construction site near the 300 block of Edmonds Avenue Southeast after reports of two men apparently taking copper cable from a Puget Sound Energy work site. When officers got to the scene, they found a 64-year-old Ravensdale man and a 56-year-old Kent man pulling on a rope hooked to a copper power cable. The cable had been cut in between power towers and was hung up in a tree. A 39-year-old Auburn man was seen in a tree wearing a climbing harness and carrying a cordless saw. Police said all three men were arrested on suspicion of first-degree attempted theft.</p> <p>On the same day after 2 p.m., officers responded to the 2900 block of Southeast Royal Hills Drive for a theft in progress. This was the same Puget Sound Energy power line system that crosses the Cedar River, just north of this location and continues towards Covington. Investigators said a person called 911 after seeing two men stealing copper cable near Beacon Way Southeast.</p>

When officers arrived, they saw a red truck and contacted two men, a 53-year-old SeaTac man and a 46-year-old Burien man, with equipment at the scene. According to police, the men had cut six copper cables free and pulled one of the cables free from a tree with a rope. Officers interviewed one of them men, who was later released and the other one was arrested on a Department of Corrections warrant. They both face charges of second-degree theft.

On Sunday morning, officers responded to the same area after a person called 911 about a group of people and cars seen parked on an access road. Two of the cars left before police arrived, but the people had climbing equipment and tools in their cars. They were all identified and then released.

Early Monday morning, officers responded to the Brighton Ridge apartments after a person called to report a man using a saw on power lines. When police arrived, they saw a 44-year-old Seattle man about 75 feet up a power line tower. Investigators said the man tried to conceal a portable bandsaw by leaving it hanging up the tower, which was later retrieved by a utility crew. The man was booked for theft.

On Tuesday morning, a Liberty Ridge resident called 911 after seeing a suspicious car in the area of Southeast Third Street and Edmonds Avenue Northeast, near the site from Saturday's arrests. When officers contacted the driver, they saw cordless saws and climbing harnesses inside the car. Police said they were unable to develop Probable Cause to arrest for any immediate offense but arrested the driver on a felony warrant arising from a weapons charge.

Puget Sound Energy said the crooks are targeting outdated transmission corridors in Renton. Officials explained the power lines are retired and not energized. The copper inside them is why contracted crews are racing to remove them before thieves do.

"We've been working 12-18 hour days trying to get all of this stuff on the ground. And as fast as we can get it on the ground, they're on the other job doing the same thing," said Matt Totten, line crew foremen with Potelco, Inc., contracted by PSE.

Police said the price for the metal wire has soared. So, criminals are going to extreme lengths to get their hands on it.

"The stuff we're wrecking out is almost three pounds a foot. So, a foot of wire makes it 15 bucks, and these spans are averaging about 500 feet. So, do that and then there's six phases up there, so you multiply by five and multiply that by six you're looking at almost \$36,000 from this tower to that tower," explained Totten.

In most cases, thieves are climbing towers as high as 75 feet by hand and foot with nothing but a saws-all.

"Once they get up there, most of them have no safety gear, no nothing. So they're just hanging on while they're trying to cut wire which is crazy," said Totten.

PSE said it's a safety hazard for not only the thieves, but for the crews due to equipment and structural damage. In a statement, officials wrote, "We've taken proactive steps to prevent theft and ensure safety such as hiring security, making sure gates/fences around equipment on the ground are secure and high voltage signs are posted. Although the lines are not energized, the damage compromises the safety of our structures and puts our crews working on these structures at risk."

Police said if anyone who lives near power lines and sees something suspicious to call 911.

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HEADLINE	04/08 Test taker prison, coach convicted in scam
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/bogus-test-taker-to-be-sentenced-in-college-admissions-scam/

BOSTON (AP) — A former Florida prep school administrator was sentenced to federal prison and a decorated water polo coach at the University of Southern California was swiftly convicted by a jury in a busy Friday in Boston federal court in the long running college admissions bribery scandal.

Mark Riddell, who was paid handsomely to take college entrance exams for wealthy students, was handed a four-month prison sentence, ordered to serve two years of supervised release and forfeit nearly \$240,000.

Meanwhile, former USC coach Jovan Vavic, who faked the athletic credentials of rich students so they could gain admission, was convicted on all three counts of fraud and bribery he faced after a jury deliberated less than a day following his nearly monthlong trial.

U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts Rachael Rollins said the verdict in Vavic's trial represents the final conviction in the headline grabbing case dubbed "Operation Varsity Blues."

The investigation announced in 2019 exposed corruption in the college admissions process at Yale, Stanford, Georgetown and other sought-after schools, and implicated wealthy and connected parents, including actors Felicity Huffman and Lori Loughlin and Loughlin's fashion designer husband, Mossimo Giannulli.

"To say the conduct in this case was reprehensible is an understatement," Rollins said afterward, acknowledging the sprawling investigation preceded her taking office earlier this year. "The rich, powerful and famous — dripping with privilege and entitlement — used their money and clout to steal college admissions spots from more qualified and deserving students."

Joseph Bonavolonta, head of the FBI's Boston office, said he hoped "many important lessons" were learned from the investigation and that colleges make sure the proper safeguards are in place.

"First and foremost, you can't pay to play and lie and cheat to circumvent the college admissions process," he said. "Because you will get caught."

Vavic, a 60-year-old, who guided USC's men's and women's water polo teams to 16 national championships, strode out of the courtroom Friday with his family, declining to comment on the verdict.

Prosecutors said he received about \$250,000 in bribes for designating unqualified students as water polo recruits so they could attend the elite Los Angeles school.

But lawyers for Vavic argued he was just doing what he could to raise money for his dominant, championship-winning program as athletic officials had demanded. They maintained he never lied, never took a bribe and was a victim of USC's desire to cover up a "pervasive culture" of accepting wealthy students who could provide donation windfalls.

The university, which fired Vavic after his 2019 arrest, has stressed its admissions processes are "not on trial."

In a separate courtroom just minutes after Vavic's verdict was read, Riddell was contrite as he faced sentencing on fraud and money laundering conspiracy charges.

The Harvard graduate, who emerged as a key figure in the wide-ranging scandal, apologized to the many students that lost out on college opportunities because of his "terrible decision."

He said he brought shame to his family and pleaded for leniency for cooperating with law enforcement officials and for committing to make amends now and going forward for his actions.

Riddell's lawyers said he should serve one to two months in prison because he was neither the ringleader of the scheme nor a university insider, like the coaches and college administrators implicated. They also noted he's already paid nearly \$166,000 toward the forfeiture obligation.

	<p>Judge Nathaniel Gorton, however, sided with prosecutors who had argued for the four-month sentence.</p> <p>He said Riddell played a key role for many years in the scheme by secretly taking the ACT and SAT for students, or correcting their answers.</p> <p>“And for what?” the judge said. “You did not need the money. How could you have stooped so low?”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/08 Whitmer kidnap plot trial: no guilty verdicts
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/jury-gets-bomb-evidence-in-gov-whitmer-kidnap-plot-trial/
GIST	<p>GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — A jury on Friday acquitted two men of all charges in a plot to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer but couldn’t reach verdicts against the two alleged leaders, a stunning defeat for the government after a weekslong trial that centered on a remarkable FBI sting operation just before the 2020 election.</p> <p>Whitmer did not immediately comment on the outcome, though her chief of staff was critical, saying Americans are “living through the normalization of political violence.”</p> <p>The result was announced on the fifth day of deliberations, a few hours after the jury said it had been struggling to find unanimity on charges in the 10-count indictment. The judge told the panel to keep working, but jurors emerged again after lunch to say they still were deadlocked on some counts.</p> <p>Daniel Harris, 24, and Brandon Caserta, 33, were found not guilty of conspiracy. In addition, Harris was acquitted of charges related to explosives and a gun.</p> <p>The jury could not reach verdicts for Adam Fox, 38, and Barry Croft Jr., 46, which means the government can put them on trial again for two conspiracy charges. Croft also faces a separate explosives charge. They’ll remain in custody.</p> <p>No juror spoke publicly about the mixed result.</p> <p>“Obviously we’re disappointed with the outcome. ... We have two defendants that are awaiting trial and we’ll get back to work on that,” U.S. Attorney Andrew Birge said.</p> <p>Harris and Caserta embraced their lawyers when U.S. District Judge Robert Jonker said they were free after 18 months in jail awaiting trial. Family members moments earlier gasped and cried with joy when the verdicts were read.</p> <p>The arrests in Michigan came amid upheaval in the U.S. in 2020. The year had started with pandemic lockdowns then shifted to armed Capitol protests over COVID-19 restrictions ordered by Whitmer and other governors. By late May, anger over racial injustice and the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police erupted into demonstrations in cities nationwide.</p> <p>In a Grand Rapids courtroom, during 13 days of testimony, prosecutors offered evidence from undercover agents, a crucial informant and two men who pleaded guilty to the plot. Jurors also read and heard secretly recorded conversations, violent social media posts and chat messages.</p> <p>Ty Garbin, who pleaded guilty and is serving a six-year prison sentence, said the plan was to get Whitmer and cause enough chaos to trigger a civil war before the election , keeping Joe Biden from winning the presidency.</p> <p>Garbin and Kaleb Franks, who also pleaded guilty and testified for the government, were among the six who were arrested in October 2020 amid talk of raising \$4,000 for an explosive to blow up a bridge and stymie any police response to a kidnapping, according to trial testimony.</p>

Prosecutors said the group was steeped in anti-government extremism and furious over Whitmer's pandemic restrictions. There was evidence of a crudely built "shoot house" to practice going in and out of her vacation home, and a night ride by Croft, Fox and covert operatives to check the property.

But defense lawyers portrayed the men as credulous weekend warriors, often stoned on marijuana and prone to big, wild talk. They said FBI agents and informants tricked and cajoled the men into targeting the governor.

During closing arguments a week ago, Fox's attorney, Christopher Gibbons, said the plan was "utter nonsense," and he pleaded with jurors to be the "firewall" against the government.

Harris was the only defendant to testify in his own defense, repeatedly telling jurors "absolutely not" when asked if he had targeted the governor.

"I think what the FBI did is unconscionable," Caserta's attorney, Michael Hills, said outside court. "And I think the jury just sent them a message loud and clear that these tactics — we're not going to condone what they've done here."

He said Whitmer was "never in any danger."

Gibbons said the acquittals of Harris and Caserta demonstrated serious shortcomings in the government's case.

"We'll be ready for another trial. ... We'll eventually get what we wanted out of this, which is the truth and the justice I think Adam is entitled to," Gibbons said.

Meanwhile, Michigan Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist said the "outcome is disappointing." Whitmer's office released a tough reaction from the governor's chief of staff, JoAnne Huls.

"The plot to kidnap and kill a governor may seem like an anomaly. But we must be honest about what it really is: The result of violent, divisive rhetoric that is all too common across our country," Huls said. "There must be accountability and consequences for those who commit heinous crimes. Without accountability, extremists will be emboldened."

Deliberations resumed earlier Friday with a court employee handing jurors a large plastic bag containing pennies, known as evidence exhibit 291. The pennies were requested before jurors went home Thursday.

Pennies taped to a commercial-grade firework were intended to act like shrapnel against Whitmer's security team, according to the government.

The trial covered 20 days since March 8, including jury selection, evidence, final arguments and jury deliberations. Croft is from Bear, Delaware, while the others are from Michigan.

Whitmer, a Democrat, wasn't a trial witness and didn't attend. She rarely talks publicly about the plot, though she referred to "surprises" during her term that seemed like "something out of fiction" when she filed for reelection on March 17.

She has blamed former President Donald Trump for fomenting anger over coronavirus restrictions and refusing to condemn right-wing extremists like those charged in the case.

A jury of six women and six men heard the case, as well as four alternates. Little is known about them. Citing privacy, Jonker ordered that they be only identified by numbers. Two jurors were dismissed during the trial because of illness.

	<p>The jury pool was drawn from a 22-county region in western and northern Michigan that is largely rural, Republican and conservative. Several people were dismissed after saying they had strong feelings about Whitmer — positive or negative — or the government.</p> <p>Matthew Schneider, a former U.S. attorney in Detroit, believes prosecutors “could have done a better job” of learning about the backgrounds and personal views of some jurors who were called up near the end of the all-day selection process.</p> <p>“The government had laid out its case. The jury didn’t believe it,” Schneider said of the verdict.</p> <p>Separately, authorities in state court are prosecuting eight men who are accused of aiding the group that was on trial in federal court.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 US Marshals recover 16 missing kids
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/10/us/us-marshals-service-new-orleans-operation/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)A three-month operation by the US Marshals Service in Louisiana led to the recovery of 16 missing children, the arrest of five individuals and uncovered allegations of sex trafficking in several of the cases, according to the agency.</p> <p>The operation, dubbed "Fresh Start," took place in the New Orleans area from January 1 of this year until March 31, according to a news release. It was led by the Missing Child Unit of the US Marshals Service Eastern District of Louisiana New Orleans Task Force.</p> <p>It ended in the rescue or recovery of 16 missing and endangered children, the agency said. "Based on the operation at least four (4) felony warrant(s) exist for adults suspected of involvement with MCU minors and the USMS New Orleans Task Force is actively pursuing these fugitives," the news release states.</p> <p>The Marshals Service highlighted several cases in which children were recovered and rescued as part of the collaborative effort. In one case, a 5-year-old girl and a 7-year-old boy were recovered in late January after they were taken by a non-custodial parent, who is their mother.</p> <p>"The Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office issued a felony warrant for the mother of the children for Kidnapping, and she made active attempts to avoid arrest along the way," the news release states. The mother took the children to the Fort Lauderdale, Florida, area where a task force recovered the children and arrested the mother.</p> <p>On January 31, a 1-year-old baby abducted in New Orleans by his father who had shot and killed the infant's grandfather was safely located and recovered. The father surrendered to the New Orleans Police Department, according to the release.</p> <p>In March, a 14-year-old "habitual runaway and previous victim of sexual assault" from St. Tammany Parish was recovered in Addis, Louisiana, with assistance from the West Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office, the release states.</p> <p>"I am very proud of the cooperative work done by all the agencies involved in safeguarding at risk children. Our Office is proud to be a part of a robust MCU program that took root in New Orleans starting in 2016," US Marshal Scott Illing said in a statement.</p> <p>"This work is being done with our partners while our office still performs its critical USMS missions (judicial and witness security, managing federal prisoners, violent fugitives' apprehension, sex offender investigations, and service of federal process)," Illing said.</p> <p>Several other agencies also participated in the operation, including the New Orleans Police Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the New York Police Department, the news release states.</p>

HEADLINE	04/09 Tackling hate crime online and real world
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/tackling-hate-crime-online-and-in-the-real-world/
GIST	<p>The second EU-wide joint action day against hate crime, supported by Europol's European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) and led by France, targeted racist and xenophobic hate speech and other hate crimes on the internet and in the real world. The operation took place in 11 countries.</p> <p>The action day on April 7 saw law enforcement authorities raid multiple locations across Europe and target 176 individuals in relation to offenses such as dissemination of racist and xenophobic hate speech, calls to violence, and incitement to commit offenses. For example in Austria, authorities carried out 12 house searches, interrogated eight individuals and seized electronic devices, mobile phones, weapons and propaganda material. Meanwhile, Spanish authorities targeted five individuals and arrested four of them for disseminating hate speech online.</p> <p>The action also included a coordinated referral activity targeting the online hate speech component of investigated cases in Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain. This resulted in 58 pieces of content on three platforms being assessed for referral to online service providers for their voluntary review against their terms and conditions. The coordinated action targeted communities and individuals using different types of content such as posts, comments, and memes to spread hate and propaganda via the internet while seizing computer devices and other evidence materials.</p> <p>The operation, targeting no specific organizations or groups, aimed at preventing hate crime, racism and xenophobia from proliferating online and offline. Law enforcement also worked together to increase awareness of individuals and groups that the internet is not a legal vacuum.</p> <p>Supposed anonymity does not hinder law enforcement from taking measures against unlawful acts; this second joint action day on hate crime sends a clear signal to individuals spreading violent hatred on the internet that their actions will be detected and attributed.</p> <p>The ECTC supported this initiative of French Gendarmerie / OCLCH from the start, providing operational coordination and facilitating the exchange of information between the participating authorities. The ECTC monitored all contributions, provided analytical support, and gave a continuous overview on the operational activities through direct contact with the involved law enforcement authorities.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/09 Focus: organized crime resulting from war
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/law-enforcement-and-public-safety/experts-focus-on-organized-crime-resulting-from-the-war-in-ukraine/
GIST	<p>Europol has hosted a European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) meeting to focus on intelligence and operational actions linked to threats of serious and organized crime, which have emerged as a result of the war in Ukraine. This meeting follows the mobilization of the EMPACT framework by the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission to address these threats. EU Ministers of the Interior endorsed this initiative at the extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs Council on March 28, 2022, as set out in the 10-Point Plan for stronger European coordination on welcoming people fleeing the war against Ukraine. Immediately afterwards, Europol, together with the French Presidency, started organizing the EMPACT meeting at Europol's headquarters in The Hague to discuss coordinated operational actions.</p> <p>During the EMPACT meeting at Europol, which was held on April 7, representatives of the EU Member States, including the drivers of the operational action plans for 15 crime areas, discussed concrete steps to address the development of serious and organized crime threats linked to the war in Ukraine. This includes</p>

the gathering of more intelligence, the implementation of emergency operational actions based on EMPACT flexibility and adaptation culture, the possibility of setting up ad hoc joint action days and the potential allocation of additional grants to fund operational activities targeting these crimes.

Initial intelligence analysis of these criminal threats identified crime patterns in a number of areas including human trafficking, online fraud, cybercrime and firearms trafficking. The evolution of the situation in Ukraine may potentially lead to an increase of criminal activities in all [10 EMPACT priority crime areas](#). Therefore, it is necessary to mobilize resources and increase the preparedness of the EMPACT community in order to respond in a swift and coordinated manner to these evolving threats. EU Member States and operational partners are actively sharing all available information and criminal intelligence with Europol, which cross-checks and analyses the information and turns it into actionable operational intelligence notifications, such as early warning notifications and threat assessments, which is shared with all partners.

The operational cooperation approach of the EMPACT framework gathers different national authorities together, including police, gendarmerie, customs and border guards, as well as judicial authorities. Non-EU countries, international organizations, and other public and private partners may also be associated. This multidisciplinary approach, which includes both intelligence analysis and operational actions, plays a central role in the joint EU response to the prevention, detection and tackling of serious and organized crime affecting the European Union and its citizens.

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[Read more at Europol](#)

HEADLINE	04/10 ICE hunts Latin America war criminals in US
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/04/10/ice-war-criminals-latin-america/
GIST	<p>Ann Schneider got the call one Friday morning at her desk in a drab Northern Virginia office tower. Another Guatemalan war criminal was rumored to be hiding in the United States.</p> <p>Schneider took notes as she listened to the tip. This time, the crimes were so horrific that the case would need to be prioritized: A suspected participant in some of Central America's bloodiest massacres was living in a Boston suburb, possibly working as a landscaper.</p> <p>Schneider created a new file under his last name, next to the folders labeled with other perpetrators of genocide, sexual violence and human rights abuses who had slipped into the United States.</p> <p>"Cuxum" she wrote for Francisco Cuxum Alvarado.</p> <p>For as long as immigrants fleeing conflict have arrived in the United States, fugitive war criminals have been among them, an infinitesimal percentage of those arriving at American borders, but a profound challenge for a nation committed to sheltering the victims of war. Nazis slipped into the country after World War II; former soldiers accused of war crimes in Bosnia arrived in the 1990s; Liberian warlords migrated after that country's strife in the 1990s and 2000s.</p> <p>But the number of alleged war criminals from Central America, absconding after civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980s, dwarfs any other population of human rights abusers living in the United States. Many were Cold War-era allies of the United States who vanished into American cities and neighborhoods, just as their victims began to call for their arrest.</p> <p>Their names arrive on Schneider's desk not because she's an agent at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, but because she occupies a more obscure, sometimes more powerful role at ICE: She's the agency's official Latin America historian.</p> <p>Schneider works at ICE's Office for Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Center, located in a Tysons, Va., office building shared with medical clinics and accounting firms. Founded in 2008, it is the U.S. government entity responsible for finding and investigating perpetrators of egregious human rights abuses who have come to the United States to escape justice.</p>

The Center reflects one of the more activist liberal impulses of the post-9/11 era, when the United States government recommitted to going after not only terrorists but also human rights abusers from around the world. The Center's staff has grown to about 75 employees, and includes Homeland Security investigators, federal prosecutors, FBI agents, ICE deportation officers — and four professional historians.

ICE's human rights work may not be the first thing that comes to mind among the left-wing activists and Democratic lawmakers calling for the abolition of the agency. But sometimes, in the case of war criminals, deportation is the closest the United States government can come to meting out justice.

Slight, with scholarly glasses and a self-effacing manner, Schneider is adamant that she remains a historian, not a law enforcement official. She has published a book, adapted from her PhD dissertation, about Brazil's post-dictatorship justice system, but there is no mention in her author bio of her job at ICE, an agency whose enforcement mission became hyper-politicized during the Trump administration.

"I think of myself as a forensic historian," she said, in an interview at her office. "I research and write. My job is about bringing things to light and uncovering the past, through these cases."

Unlike most academics, who tend to study their material with a degree of intellectual detachment, Schneider is a historian who is actively trying to right the wrongs of Latin America's recent past. She is a bridge between those in the university world who research war crimes and federal law enforcement officials who can actually do something about them.

That was how Schneider first heard about Cuxum, now 67. He was a former paramilitary officer, who was thought to be involved in the Rio Negro massacres of the early 1980s, where hundreds of Indigenous villagers were killed, and in the serial rape of Indigenous Maya Achi women.

His name had been known for years among victims and those who studied the crimes.

One of them was Kathy Dill, an anthropologist in California who specializes in Guatemala. She had learned through colleagues about Schneider. It was early 2017, when Dill dialed her number.

"I think I have a case you want to know about," Dill said.

Scorched-earth tactics

Margarita Alvarado Enriquez had known Francisco Cuxum since they were children in the village of Xococ, in the verdant hills of central Guatemala, a place too small and too poor for a school.

"I'm going to marry you one day," Cuxum sometimes yelled at her, a comment that became less funny and more sinister as they got older.

Alvarado, now 55, remembers thinking: I need to keep my distance from this boy.

When Alvarado did get married, she was 24, and her husband, Silverio Xitumul Lajuj, was another resident of Xococ. They had grown up on opposite ends of the same dirt road. What luck to meet someone in this village, where nothing ever happens, Alvarado thought. In September 1981, she found out she was pregnant.

Far from Xococ, in the mountains of northern Guatemala, the war was already raging. The country's U.S.-backed military was dispatched to quash a nascent left-wing insurgency. By 1980, Guatemalan soldiers had killed thousands of civilians, the vast majority of them members of Indigenous groups. Senior military officials claimed the insurgency was widening in an attempt to justify scorched-earth tactics.

Alvarado, who was Maya Achi, knew little of the war, which in Xococ sounded more like a rumor. But just before 1980, the government began claiming that her region, too, was home to insurgents, in part because of local resistance to a planned hydroelectric dam.

In November 1981, armed men poured into Xococ, most of them wearing civilian clothes. They were a mix of Guatemalan soldiers and civil patrolmen, including local, Indigenous men who had agreed to fight on behalf of the Guatemalan government in their own villages. Cuxum and three of his brothers were among them, according to multiple residents.

Alvarado's husband had gone to work on a nearby farm, Alvarado remembers. He did not return at the end of the day. A number of other men from the town also went missing. Later that night, Alvarado's sister, Inocenta, said she saw civil patrolmen, including Cuxum, shooting at a group of men, including Alvarado's husband.

Alvarado waited at home over the following days, not sure what to do. One afternoon, a group of armed men burst through the door. There were about six of them, she remembers.

"Your husband isn't here to protect you," one said.

They covered her mouth, kicked her and slapped her. Then they ordered her to take her clothes off and took her to the bedroom. They took turns raping her. Some of the men she didn't recognize. But one of their faces was immediately familiar. It was Cuxum. He was one of the last men to rape her, she said.

The men walked out of the house together, leaving her weeping on the ground. Days later, she lost her baby in a miscarriage. Over the course of a few months, dozens of other Xococ women would be raped by soldiers and patrolmen, according to witnesses and subsequent investigations.

Not long after that, troops and armed men arrived at the nearby village of Rio Negro, killing 177 women and children, according to investigators, in what became one of the most infamous incidents of the war. Some children were bludgeoned against rocks. Others were slaughtered with machetes. Women were gang raped in front of their kids. When survivors created a list of the assailants they recognized, several said they remembered the same slim man with dark hair: Francisco Cuxum.

When the violence in Xococ ended, after the government crushed pockets of resistance across the country, Alvarado left for Guatemala City, finding work as a housecleaner. She returned only occasionally to Xococ. But small-town gossip still made it back to her: news that Cuxum was a civilian again, had a child, and was working at a garment factory in Guatemala City. Once, on a trip back to Xococ, she saw him through the window of a taxi.

"That's him. I can't believe it," she recalled in an interview in Guatemala City.

Cuxum was free. So were most of the other civil patrolmen and soldiers who had raped the Maya Achi women and killed several hundred of the area's residents. Guatemala chose not to prosecute war criminals in the years after the war, which left 200,000 dead. Many of the victims – like Alvarado's husband – remained missing, thought to be scattered in unmarked graves.

When the United Nations-backed peace accords were signed in 1996, the country's Congress passed a National Reconciliation Law that politicians suggested would allow Guatemala to move on from the conflict. But it seemed to amount to absolution for war criminals, giving them little reason to help locate the bodies of their victims.

When Alvarado thought of Cuxum, she said to herself: "That man knows where my husband is buried."

Documenting the war dead

Schneider was a young high school teacher living in Omaha in 1998 when [Chilean Gen. Augusto Pinochet](#) was arrested in London on behalf of prosecutors in Spain who wanted to try him for genocide. She had been reading Latin American authors after studying Spanish and English literature at Creighton University, and was "mesmerized" by the attempt to bring Pinochet to justice for the deaths of more than 3,000 killed and disappeared by his military government.

"I thought: how is this happening? I wanted to do that work," she said.

Schneider quit her teaching job and went to graduate school, first at the University of Texas, then the University of Chicago. She was working as an adjunct professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 2009 when she came across the job posting at ICE.

The agency had started [the Center](#) as a pilot program but the Obama Administration moved to make it permanent. "The ad said they were looking for a historian with a PhD who had experience researching conflict and working with archives," said Schneider. "I had never thought about a career in law enforcement."

Historians of Latin America who focus on the Cold War are well-versed in the role of the United States in supporting right-wing military governments in Chile, Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala and elsewhere. In some cases, the State Department intentionally resettled former military officials in the United States to create better conditions for peace negotiations.

Guatemalan war criminals had scattered across the United States doing mundane jobs. A former Special Forces soldier implicated in a massacre was working as a cook at a Boca Raton, Fla., country club. A former civil patrolman purchased a discothèque in Providence, R.I. Another soldier accused of war crimes was a house cleaner in Santa Ana, Calif. Each of those men was investigated and ultimately deported.

By the 2000s, Cuxum seemed to have vanished from Guatemala. There were no more sightings of him at family parties in Xococ. His co-workers in the capital lost track of him.

Some of his other victims, however, had begun to search for him in earnest, encouraged by Guatemala's first prosecutions of war criminals. Some exemptions for serious war crimes had been carved out in the reconciliation law, and there was mounting pressure from victims and NGOs to pursue perpetrators of the most egregious crimes. Alvarado and other survivors could build a case against Cuxum – but it would be useless if they couldn't find him.

Alvarado decided to record her testimony against Cuxum and enter it into the public record, so that it could be used if he was ever located. She got help from Jesús Tecú Osorio, one of few survivors of the Rio Negro massacre, who had begun leading efforts to hold war criminals to account.

Osorio had watched as both his parents and his 2-year-old brother were killed. He was 10 at the time. He said he'd seen Cuxum at the site of the killing. Then he heard the testimonies of Alvarado and other rape victims implicating Cuxum in separate crimes.

Osorio began sending friends to Xococ to casually inquire about Cuxum's whereabouts.

"I haven't seen him," they would say, feigning concern. "Is he ok?"

Finally, one of Cuxum's relatives volunteered: "Francisco migrated north."

When the news made it to Alvarado, it felt like the slim chance at justice had melted away.

"We'll never get him now," she said to herself.

But Osorio continued his investigation. One day, another tip came through. Cuxum was in Boston.

With a better sense of his whereabouts, Osorio thought, maybe U.S. authorities would be able to track him down. But Osorio didn't know anyone in the U.S. government. So he called one of the few people he knew in the United States, an anthropologist named Kathy Dill, who had done her dissertation research in the municipality of Rabinal, of which Xococ is a part.

In the 1990s, Dill had participated in several exhumations in Rabinal, helping to identify and document the war dead, partly in the hope that the bodies could be used to help bring criminal indictments.

“Jesús asked me, ‘Do you know anyone who can help find this guy? We think he’s in the U.S.,’” Dill recalled. She called the historian she had heard about at ICE.

For months, Dill heard almost nothing from ICE. She didn’t doubt Schneider’s commitment to the case, but realized there were aspects of the investigation beyond her control. After more than a year passed, she wondered if under the Trump Administration, officials had decided that Cuxum wasn’t worth pursuing.

“I wondered if maybe they thought chasing war criminals was a little too lefty,” she said.

Back in Guatemala, Osorio and Alvarado were losing hope. Every day, when Osorio drove to his office at the Rabinal human rights law office, he drove past the home of Cuxum’s son, Reginaldo Cuxum, built with remittances from the United States.

Making the arrest

When the Cuxum case reached the Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) offices in Boston in April 2019, it was picked up by Matthew Langille, a midcareer federal agent with little experience in human rights cases. “If you had asked me what happened in Guatemala in 1982, I would have had no idea,” he said.

Langille’s first challenge: Cuxum did not appear in any online profiles, phone directories or conventional databases. “He was a ghost,” said Langille.

“His life here was remarkably quiet, unassuming. I think that’s the way he wanted it to be,” he said.

Langille had two photos of Cuxum: one sent by Guatemalan authorities and another from a Department of Homeland Security database dating back to Cuxum’s 2004 immigration arrest along the border in Douglas, Ariz. Cuxum’s fingerprints were in the system, too, obtained before his deportation back to Guatemala. His unauthorized return to the United States meant the government would be able to charge him with a felony for illegally reentering the country.

But first Langille had to find him.

An HSI criminal analyst working with Langille traced Cuxum to Waltham, a blue-collar suburb west of Boston with a well-established Guatemalan immigrant community.

Langille knew some Waltham police detectives from his days working Boston-area narcotics cases. He brought them the photos of Cuxum, and they began querying sources in the Guatemalan community. Within days the detectives came back to Langille: an older man fitting Cuxum’s description was working for a Waltham landscaping company, cutting grass, trimming shrubs and living in a modest yellow duplex on Robbins Street, near the center of town.

“He was one of their more experienced landscapers,” Langille said, “a guy who showed up to work every day.”

The photos of Cuxum were 15 years old, but when Langille spotted him, he knew right away. Cuxum’s large ears, “with long bottom lobes that protruded,” were a giveaway, he said.

“When you’re looking for someone, there are certain characteristics that don’t change much with age,” said Langille, recounting the investigation in an interview in Waltham. “You die with your ears the same shape.”

Langille didn’t want to make the arrest when Cuxum was leaving work, worried his co-workers could try to intervene. Nor did he want to risk a potential confrontation in Cuxum’s home.

Langille and a small team set up for the arrest near the spot where Cuxum's co-worker had been dropping him off after work, about 100 yards from the duplex. On April 30, just after 5 p.m., Cuxum got out of the co-worker's truck, crossed the street and headed toward the yellow house.

Cuxum was stoic as he was taken into custody, Langille recalled. He read Cuxum his Miranda Rights, then took him to the Waltham police station so a Spanish-speaking officer could repeat them. There was no mention of Rabinal. "At time of the arrest, I did not inform him of anything related to Guatemala."

Get him talking

Langille called Schneider the next day in preparation for his interview with Cuxum at the jail. They had a slam-dunk case for the illegal reentry charge, but they wanted to get something from Cuxum that might help Guatemalan prosecutors secure a conviction for the rapes and killings decades earlier.

"My task had been to locate him and put him under arrest," Langille said. "But I needed to understand the context, and what happened in Rabinal."

Schneider explained the Rio Negro massacres and Maya Achi rapes, as well as Cuxum's alleged role and the Guatemalan government's case in a "Reader's Digest version," Langille said.

Schneider did not expect Cuxum to confess to sexual assault and murder. But she wanted Langille to see if Cuxum would acknowledge his participation in Rabinal's civil defense patrols at the time of the atrocities.

"Our job as historians at the Center is to give the agents what they need," said Schneider. "First I give them the general landscape, then the portrait."

Cuxum spoke little English, so Langille brought a translator. Using interview techniques he developed interrogating drug suspects, Langille said he tried to build a rapport that would put Cuxum at ease and get him talking.

Not long into the conversation, it became clear to Cuxum that Langille wanted to know about more than immigration violations. He was asking about the civilian patrol units, or PACs. Cuxum insisted at first that he was in the military living in Guatemala City at the time of the rapes and massacres, but as Langille began to challenge him, Cuxum acknowledged that wasn't true.

"I was able to press him a bit, and he said he was in the Rabinal PAC," Langille said. "He said he patrolled six days a week and his only purpose was to protect his neighbors."

Cuxum also acknowledged he'd served in the patrols under the command of Carlos Chen Gomez, a convicted war criminal who died in a Guatemalan prison.

Langille prodded further, but Cuxum turned quiet and withdrawn as it became clearer why he'd been arrested. "He had this 1,000-yard stare," said Langille. "He didn't expect that day to be the day this was all brought back to him."

In the hours after Cuxum's indictment, on May 29, 2019, word spread quickly among the former residents of Xococ.

One of Alvarado's sisters sent her the ICE news release over WhatsApp. She had someone translate it and read it aloud.

"I can't believe they got him," Alvarado remembers thinking.

Officials at ICE asked Osorio if he wanted to fly to Boston to attend the hearing several weeks later. He sat a few rows behind Cuxum in the courtroom and listened to the judge's sentence: six months in prison, almost certain to be followed by deportation back to Guatemala.

Cuxum turned around to face the gallery. He appeared to scan faces until he saw Osorio. Cuxum scowled at him, a look filled with disgust.

“It was a look that burned through me,” Osorio said.

Back in Guatemala, Alvarado saw the photo of Cuxum in the courtroom. He was 64, overweight and balding, wearing a government-issued white sweatshirt.

“Look at him now,” she said. “He’s an old man.”

Within a few weeks, he was in shackles on an ICE deportation flight. Guatemalan authorities detained him after he landed.

Naming the men

Only once before had the Guatemalan government tried a case of wartime sexual violence in its courts. Within the country’s military, which still resisted an accounting of war crimes, opposition to the case was stark. Some former soldiers, civil patrolmen and their relatives posted on Facebook, calling the trial a sham.

For the women of Xococ, it meant that after four decades, they would have to testify in front of their abusers.

The trial started in January 2022 in a courtroom in Guatemala City. Because of coronavirus protocols, Cuxum and the five other men remained in a military prison but followed the proceeding through a video link to the courtroom.

When Alvarado attended the first hearing, she saw Cuxum on the screen. He and the other men were backlit, so it was difficult to make out their faces. The screen was hanging from the ceiling, and it gave the impression that the men were looking down on them, hovering over the judge.

It was more than a week into the trial that the judge called Alvarado’s name, asking for her testimony. It had been recorded earlier, so Alvarado listened as her own words were played through the courtroom’s sound system, looking up periodically to see if she could discern Cuxum’s expression.

In the recorded testimony, she described the men pouring into her house.

“They told me they would cover my mouth and that they would kill me. That they would cover my face. So I didn’t say anything,” she said.

At the end of her testimony, she named the men she recognized, starting with Cuxum.

Up on the screen, his face was too dark to make out any reaction. But she could tell that he was looking straight ahead at the camera. It made it seem like he was staring at her.

It was the end of January when the judges issued their verdict in the trial. Alvarado and some of the other women attended court that day wearing traditional Mayan clothes, hand-sewn shawls over their shoulders.

Before the sentencing, the judges asked if any of the women wanted to address the courtroom.

Alvarado, wearing a white veil over her head, stood up and walked closer to the judges. She knew the men weren’t being tried for her husband’s murder, but she felt strongly that the same men who raped her had also killed him and hid his remains.

“I want you to hand over my husband, to tell me where you put his body, to give me his remains.”

	<p>“I am still in pain after so many years. I am here seeking justice,” she said.</p> <p>Schneider was watching the trial in Northern Virginia on a live stream, thinking of Alvarado and the other victims. “A journey that took 40 years,” she said.</p> <p>Soon after Alvarado’s testimony, the judges prepared to read their decision.</p> <p>“The women were subjected to continuous rape and also to domestic slavery,” Gervi Sical, one of the judges said. “We the judges firmly believe the testimonies of the women who were sexually violated.”</p> <p>Cuxum and the other men, including two of his brothers, were sentenced to 30 years in prison.</p> <p>Alvarado cried silently.</p> <p>Weeks later, she was sitting on the edge of her bed in her studio apartment. The trial had gotten more attention in Guatemala than she had expected. Local newspapers had published front-page stories with her photo.</p> <p>Now she was wondering if she could return to Xococ to visit her family. Would Cuxum’s relatives try to attack her? What about his former military colleagues?</p> <p>“Maybe I just won’t go,” she said. “Maybe I shouldn’t go back again.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Austin battle looms: 19 cops charged
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-austin-texas-a-battle-looms-over-what-police-did-during-protests-11649592003?mod=hp_listb_pos2
GIST	<p>AUSTIN, Texas—While many U.S. cities have grappled with fallout from protests following the murder of George Floyd nearly two years ago, none have gone the route of Austin, where county prosecutors are pressing criminal cases against more than a dozen police officers.</p> <p>Initial hearings are set to begin in coming weeks for the 19 members of the Austin Police Department who were charged in February with aggravated assault by a public servant for shooting protesters and bystanders with beanbag munitions during the 2020 protests.</p> <p>So far, early legal wrangling has addressed whether evidence was presented fairly to the grand jury. It represents the first battle between defense lawyers and those from the office of new Travis County District Attorney José Garza, who won the Democratic nomination for the seat weeks after the protests, after running a campaign heavily focused on police accountability.</p> <p>Protests broke out in Austin at the end of May 2020, following the deaths of George Floyd in Minneapolis and an Austin man, Michael Ramos, who was killed by police gunfire. Dozens of protesters and observers were injured by police beanbag rounds over the course of two days as crowds rallied in front of the Austin Police Department and overtook nearby Interstate 35.</p> <p>Many U.S. cities saw police-inflicted injuries to protesters in 2020, and a few have seen one or two officers charged with a crime. Grand juries are pending in the cases of four other Austin protesters shot with beanbags, including two deaf men.</p> <p>“In more than 20 years, I have not seen this type of case—it just doesn’t happen,” said Bill Johnson, executive director for the National Association of Police Organizations. In his experience, mass indictments of police officers are more often linked to corruption than force, while widespread use-of-force issues are more often handled with department reform.</p>

Austin is different from other cities that had protests in two ways, observers say: Its district attorney has given priority to police accountability and particularly large numbers of people were injured in widespread use of beanbag shots.

Police have characterized Mr. Garza as solely interested in indicting police officers. Mr. Garza has pushed back against such accusations, noting in February that he has already prosecuted dozens of cases against protesters who committed crimes.

Attorneys for many of the wounded say Austin was unusual among cities in its widespread use of beanbag munitions in crowd situations. The pellet-filled rounds, fired by shotgun, are often called less lethal by law-enforcement communities, though their use has come under more scrutiny in the wake of serious injuries sustained during 2020 protests. Austin police said they no longer use the weapons in crowds.

“It was worse here than anywhere,” said Rebecca Webber, a lawyer for some of the people injured, of the use of force by police against protesters.

Austin police have acknowledged that the weapons caused devastating injuries to a number of people, many of them bystanders who weren’t the intended targets of the shots. Former Austin Police Chief Brian Manley, who stepped down last year, said in a news conference immediately after the protests that he was crushed by the early reports of critical injuries.

“I’ve cried a few times today,” he said at the time. “That is not what we set out to do as a police department.”

Police officers have said they were acting as instructed, following policy set by the department as a whole, said Austin Police Association President Ken Casaday. “The officers did what they did, but they did not do it without the blessing of the chief of police,” Mr. Casaday said.

Neither Mr. Manley nor representatives for the Austin Police Department responded to requests seeking comment. Police Chief Joseph Chacon, who was appointed after Mr. Manley’s departure, said when the indictments were announced that he didn’t believe any officer conduct rose to the level of criminal violation during the protests.

Police officers have also said they were provided faulty munitions; they believe the beanbags may have been old and hardened, Mr. Casaday said.

Civil-rights groups have noted that the injuries seen in Austin are consistent with injuries from beanbag shots elsewhere. “Unless everybody’s beanbags were old and hardened, because we’re seeing these injuries everywhere,” said Lauren Bonds, legal director for the National Police Accountability Project. The group has filed some two dozen lawsuits involving 2020 protest injuries in cities including New York; Denver; Rochester, N.Y.; Oakland, Calif., and Charlotte, N.C.

In Austin, Justin Howell, then a 20-year-old college student, was left with a fractured skull and brain damage after he was struck with a beanbag on May 31, 2020. Police said they shot him accidentally.

Anthony Evans said in a lawsuit that he was walking away from the protests when he was hit in the head with a beanbag, causing emergency surgery and permanent disfigurement. In a filing, the city agreed he was nonthreatening and wasn’t suspected of committing a crime.

Physicians at nearby Dell Medical Center treated 19 patients with beanbag injuries during two days of the protests, they wrote in the New England Journal of Medicine. At least seven required emergency surgery for brain bleeds, skull and jaw fractures and brain damage.

The 19 Austin officers charged were involved in 10 beanbag incidents, with nine of the officers indicted over the same injury to a woman struck in the head. The city has begun to settle civil lawsuits from protesters, including agreeing to pay \$8 million to Mr. Howell and \$2 million to Mr. Evans.

	<p>Austin police are trained that beanbag shots to the chest have the potential to cause serious injury or death, and shots to the head, neck and groin “should be avoided unless it is the intent to deliver deadly force,” according to training materials.</p> <p>Protests in Austin, the state capital, are a frequent occurrence. In 2020, however, protesters shut down Interstate 35 and some began throwing water bottles and rocks, which Mr. Casaday said was a danger.</p> <p>Civil settlements with the injured people were the appropriate way to take responsibility for the injuries, Mr. Casaday said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Jan 6 riot prosecutors face new headwinds
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/jan-6-capitol-riot-prosecutors-face-new-headwinds-11649592002?mod=hp_lead_pos6
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—The Justice Department has expanded its investigation into the Jan. 6 Capitol riot and is gearing up for summer trials in some of the most serious related cases brought so far, just as some cracks in prosecutors’ strategies have started to emerge.</p> <p>In recent weeks, a judge issued the first full acquittal among hundreds of cases, of a man who said he believed police officers ushered him into the building, and acquitted another man of the more serious charge he faced. In both cases, U.S. District Judge Trevor McFadden, an appointee of former President Donald Trump, said the defendants didn’t engage in the violence and destruction at the heart of many of the Justice Department’s cases.</p> <p>Another possibly complicating factor for the government: At least a half-dozen Federal Bureau of Investigation informants were in the crowd at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, as the pro-Trump mob stormed the building, according to people familiar with the matter, who say none of them appear to have been sent there by the bureau to engage in or encourage violence. Defense lawyers are pressing the FBI for information about those informants, the people said. The informants could be an issue as prosecutors prepare for their first trial in July on sedition and other charges against members of the right-wing militia Oath Keepers, as well as a potential August trial of members of the Proud Boys on conspiracy and obstruction charges. The presence of informants could open the door for defense attorneys to argue their clients were coerced into violence.</p> <p>The FBI declined to comment on the informants, citing standing practice against talking about sources. In another case that illustrated the challenges informants can present, a federal jury on Friday acquitted two of four men charged in an alleged conspiracy to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in 2020. Defense attorneys had argued that undercover agents and informants had tricked the men into agreeing to the plot. In that case, authorities stopped a plot from going forward, while the issue may be less relevant for Jan. 6 prosecutors since violence did occur.</p> <p>Jan. 6 prosecutors have issued subpoenas for information about the planning of the rally that preceded the attack and any involvement of government figures, broadening their lens beyond the later violence at the Capitol itself. Prosecutors had considered pursuing that line of inquiry soon after the riot but decided to forgo it over First Amendment concerns, people familiar with the matter have said. To bring a case against any of the people involved in events before the riot, prosecutors would likely need to tie them directly to the violence or prove that their speech was directed toward inciting violence under circumstances in which it was likely, given that speech is otherwise protected under the U.S. Constitution, experts said.</p> <p>“Any time speech is implicated in the conduct that forms the basis for a criminal charge, it’s a big challenge for prosecutors,” said David Deitch, a former Justice Department official who has experience with terrorism cases.</p>

One of those to receive a subpoena was Ali Alexander, a far-right activist and leader of the “Stop the Steal” movement, who planned and participated in rallies before the breach. Mr. Alexander had been active in the weeks before the event, calling on supporters to oppose the election results and go to the U.S. Capitol.

Mr. Alexander said in a statement issued by his lawyer that the grand jury is seeking information on people and groups involved in pro-Trump events that took place before the riot. “I don’t believe I have any information that will be useful to them, but I am cooperating as best I can,” Mr. Alexander said in the statement, first reported by the New York Times.

Attorney General Merrick Garland is facing increased pressure from some Democrats who want him to quickly investigate and prosecute those they say were involved the Capitol attack, including Mr. Trump and some of his associates. Mr. Garland has said prosecutors would hold lawbreakers accountable “at all levels.” He hasn’t elaborated except to say that the only pressure the Justice Department feels is to “do the right thing.”

Democrats ratcheted up their criticism of the department after a federal judge in March said Mr. Trump and a law professor “more likely than not” committed a felony in their efforts to block the 2020 election results, in a ruling clearing the way for related emails to be turned over to investigators on the House select committee investigating the Capitol attack. Mr. Trump has denied wrongdoing, and such a case would hinge on obtaining proof that Mr. Trump knew he had no ability to lawfully change the election outcome but pushed for it anyway, legal experts have said.

Congress has been pushing forward on a host of areas related to Jan. 6 that have presented related issues for the Justice Department to grapple with. The House last week referred two Trump allies—Dan Scavino, the deputy chief of staff for communications in Mr. Trump’s White House, and Peter Navarro, the former trade adviser—to the Justice Department for potential prosecution for failing to respond to committee subpoenas. Prosecutors are still examining whether Mr. Trump’s last chief of staff, Mark Meadows, should be charged with contempt, after the committee referred his case in December. In November they charged former adviser Steve Bannon, who had pleaded not guilty.

On Thursday, a separate congressional oversight committee sent a letter to Mr. Garland accusing the Justice Department of obstructing its investigation into Mr. Trump’s handling of White House records by preventing the release of information from the National Archives. The department has taken steps to begin probing 15 boxes of White House records that Mr. Trump took to his residence at Mar-a-Lago after leaving office. The Archives in February said it found classified material inside the boxes and asked the Justice Department to review it.

That case adds to the host of politically sensitive investigations facing Mr. Garland, who has sought to insulate the department from partisan influence.

More than 200 people have pleaded guilty to participating in the Jan. 6 riot, but hundreds more are fighting the charges. In court, more than three-dozen criminal trials for the defendants are scheduled for the coming months, in cases that are expected to further test prosecutors’ aggressive approach.

Among the most closely watched are two sprawling cases against leaders in the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers groups, whom the FBI was concerned about in the weeks leading up to Jan. 6.

One FBI informant recorded a November 2020 meeting among Oath Keepers members on GoToMeeting, on which prosecutors have alleged the group’s leader, Stewart Rhodes, outlined a plan to stop the transfer of presidential power, including preparing to use force.

The meeting is referenced in Mr. Rhodes’s indictment on seditious conspiracy and other charges, which doesn’t say how the government learned of it. An informant had recorded the meeting using one phone to dial in to the meeting and the camera on another to capture the voices on the call, and turned it over to the FBI, some of the people said.

The FBI also had at least one informant affiliated with the Proud Boys: a member from the Kansas City area who sent his FBI handler text messages detailing the riot as it was unfolding, people familiar with the matter said. Some of the informants, who came from across the U.S., didn't enter the building and hadn't appeared to have anticipated the day to unfold as it did, some of the people said.

Defense lawyers have learned about some of the informants in recent months and have asked prosecutors for more information about whether there were others, the people said. While defendants often argue they were instigated to commit crimes by government informants, it is unclear if any such arguments will be successful in the Jan. 6 cases, as no evidence has yet emerged to support such a claim.

On Friday, a leader of the Proud Boys, Charles Donohoe, 34 years old, of North Carolina, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding and assaulting, resisting or impeding police, both felonies, part of a broader conspiracy case against several members of the group. Mr. Donohoe agreed to cooperate with prosecutors, who could seek a lesser sentence than the 70- to 87-month guideline called for in the agreement if they determine he provides substantial assistance in the continuing case. Last month, prosecutors said they may add defendants and additional charges to that case.

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HEADLINE	04/09 Proud Boys member pleads guilty
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/09/proud-boys-member-guilty-january-6-capitol-attack
GIST	<p>A member of the far-right Proud Boys group has pleaded guilty to conspiring to attack the US Capitol in a bid to stop Congress certifying Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election, giving prosecutors a win in their pursuit of high-ranking members.</p> <p>As part of an agreement with prosecutors that will require him to cooperate against co-defendants, Charles Donohoe, 34, pleaded guilty on Friday in US district court in Washington to charges of conspiring to obstruct an official proceeding and assaulting Capitol police.</p> <p>The North Carolina native could face up to 28 years in prison. However, citing federal sentencing guidelines, prosecutors estimated in court records he would serve six or seven years.</p> <p>The judge, Timothy Kelly, did not immediately set a sentencing date. Five co-defendants, including well-known group members Enrique Tarrio and Dominic Pezzola, are tentatively scheduled to go to trial in May.</p> <p>In December, Matthew Greene of New York became the first Proud Boys member to admit to a role in the plot to attack the Capitol, as part of a deal with prosecutors. Greene also agreed to cooperate with authorities.</p> <p>According to prosecutors, on 6 January, Donohoe was among at least 100 Proud Boys who marched from the "Save America" rally near the White House to the Capitol in hope of derailing Congress' certification of Biden's victory over Donald Trump.</p> <p>Donohoe held a high rank in the group. In the days leading up to the rally, he, Tarrio and others used encrypted messaging apps to discuss organizing a "Ministry of Self Defense" that would invade the Capitol.</p> <p>After arriving at the building, Donohoe threw two water bottles at and pushed past a line of police officers who tried to stop the mob, prosecutors wrote in a summary of the case that Donohoe endorsed.</p> <p>Donohoe took a picture of Pezzola holding a riot shield just outside the Capitol, bragging in a message to other members of the militia: "Got a riot shield."</p>

	<p>The group made it inside after Pezzola allegedly broke a window, prompting Donohoe to send other messages boasting, “We stormed the capitol unarmed” and “took it over unarmed” because “the people are ... done”.</p> <p>A bipartisan Senate report connected seven deaths to the riot, which temporarily slowed certification of Biden’s win as lawmakers fled. About 140 police officers were injured.</p> <p>Authorities have charged more than 800 people in connection with the attack, with one particularly high-profile case filed in federal court in Washington taking aim at Donohoe, Tarrio – who was not at the Capitol on 6 January – Pezzola and three other Proud Boys members.</p> <p>Donohoe has been held in federal detention since his arrest in March last year. Tarrio, Pezzola, Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs and Zachary Rehl have pleaded not guilty and for now intend to go to trial, beginning 18 May.</p> <p>All six defendants are also named in a pending federal lawsuit from the District of Columbia which demands damages from the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, another far-right group, over the Capitol attack.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/10 Homeless camps ‘magnets for crime’
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/magnets-for-crime-how-one-seattle-politicians-views-shifted-on-homeless-encampments/
GIST	<p>Recently the freshman Seattle City Councilmember Andrew Lewis was listening to a discussion on the extreme rise in gun violence in the city, and some simple questions were raised that he realized he didn’t know concrete answers to.</p> <p>Who’s doing the shooting, and where?</p> <p>So he asked police for some data on shots fired in the city, cross-referenced with other factors the cops knew about each incident. The answers that came back have him saying some unusual-sounding things in progressive Seattle, that have some fellow council members “looking at me a little funny,” he says.</p> <p>Things like: “It is blatantly evident that a significant amount of the city’s crime and disorder is attributable to conditions in homeless encampments.”</p> <p>And: “It was easy to say ‘oh, leave the poor encampments alone,’ when there weren’t very many of them, and they weren’t leading to this.”</p> <p>What Lewis found is that more than 18% of all shots-fired incidents in Seattle last year were associated with homelessness, according to police records. This means that “the victim, or suspect, are experiencing homelessness, or the [shooting] occurred at/near a homeless encampment or RV,” the police said.</p> <p>These shootings were up 122% in 2021 versus 2020. “A nexus to homelessness accounted for the largest proportion” of incidents in the city, the police said — more than gang-related shootings, domestic violence, nightlife-related incidents, road rage, shootings during robberies or any other category.</p> <p>Of the 113 homelessness-related shootings last year, the most were in the Chinatown International District (23 incidents), followed by Northgate and the downtown commercial district, with 11 each. About half of the shootings caused injury (56) or death (5).</p> <p>Lewis runs the city’s committee on homelessness. He was shaken by this data — not because he didn’t know the unauthorized encampments were dangerous, but because his own committee hadn’t grappled with the extent of it. Probably nobody on his committee would have guessed that homelessness and the</p>

encampments were a bigger associating factor with Seattle's shooting epidemic than gang activity (though there's also some crossover between the two).

It doesn't mean people living outside are uniquely prone to commit violence, Lewis said. Frequently it's people in and around the encampments who are the victims.

"When I say 'homeless,' it's a misnomer," a police assistant chief echoed to The Seattle Times last week, in [a story about how 40% of the police homicide unit's case load](#) is related to the encampments.

"We're seeing the violence centered on illegal encampments, where there's a general sense of lawlessness that concentrates bad actors and concentrates narcotics in one area."

"I am not making any argument from this data as to the causation of the shootings," Lewis said.

"Encampments though are massive magnets for crime. On that the data is clear."

It's an issue that has twisted Seattle in knots for years. Clearing encampments is seen as criminalizing or [victimizing poverty](#), and so they've often been allowed to stay and grow, out of a sense of compassion.

I've argued in this space for more than [a decade now](#) that allowing these makeshift encampments is a humanitarian catastrophe — [back to the days of The Jungle](#), which itself was only closed after a mass shooting. The shantytowns are an embarrassment to both Seattle and the liberal project. We need more shelter — [tiny house villages](#), [tent cities](#), [motel rooms](#), [safe parking lots](#), [FEMA facilities](#) — so that the city can end the unsanctioned camps and provide safer, managed places for people to go.

The end goal is permanent housing, but that's going to take many, many years to build.

This is a debate I have lost.

"The city has actually lost emergency shelter units this year," Lewis said.

But Lewis said he's noticed another correlation, one that's as powerful as the shooting stats.

"There has never been a shooting in a tiny house village, or on the premises of JustCARE," a hotel-based shelter program which serves the toughest cases out of the encampments, Lewis said.

"These shootings occur out in the encampments," he said. "But if you bring people into shelter, the disorder generally doesn't follow. In the tiny house villages or JustCARE hotels, there's security, community, management, counseling. I think out in the encampments it's survival-based, and people just respond to the demands of their environment."

JustCARE, which got started during the pandemic, has had success moving people out from the hillsides and under bridges. Of seven encampments cleared, including the one next to the King County Courthouse that had seen a murder and a string of assaults, JustCARE got about 200 people to come inside while about 40 did not, for various reasons, [according to a report by the group last month](#).

"It's the most effective program I've seen in a decade of working on quality of life issues downtown," Brian Cannon, of the Downtown Seattle Association, told the council.

It's also very expensive — \$49,000 per bed per year just for services and staffing. That doesn't include the cost of the hotel room itself. This price is the main reason the program is fighting for survival — its funding is scheduled to expire in June.

So here we are again, with this same choice. We can pay to get people inside, into temporary shelter as a start, and prod it along by clearing encampments. Or we can keep saying "leave the poor encampments alone."

	<p>I asked Lewis what his aim was for speaking out bluntly like that, other than potentially getting run out of office.</p> <p>“I think we haven’t been entirely honest about the public safety impacts of this issue for some time,” he said. “That’s really it. It feels like Seattle is at a pivot point right now and can stand to hear these facts.”</p> <p>Hope he’s right. But these encampments have long been one of Seattle’s most perplexing blind spots. A lot is riding on which way we pivot, or if we can change course at all.</p>
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